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**Exploring Young Children's Social Identities:  
Performing Social Class, Gender and Ethnicity in  
Primary School**

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PhD

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# **Declaration**

This thesis has been composed by me, is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Marlies Kustatscher

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# Abstract

This thesis explores how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in primary school.

In doing so, this study contributes to a growing body of literature that recognises the complexity and intersecting nature of children's social identities, and views children as actively performing their social identities within discursively shaped contexts. The study operationalizes intersectionality as a sensitising concept for understanding the particular ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity are performed differently in different contexts, and for conceptualising the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity as constitutive of and irreducible to each other.

An eight-month long ethnography was conducted in an urban Scottish primary school with young children (aged five to seven). Data were generated mainly from participant observation in the classroom, lunch hall, playground and other spaces of the school, interviews with children and staff, and from gathering a range of texts and documents (e.g. legislation and school displays).

The findings of the study show that social class, gender and ethnicity intersect in the complex ways in which children perform their social identities. Particular identities are foregrounded in specific moments and situations (Valentine, 2007), yet the performing of social identities is not reducible to either social class *or* gender *or* ethnicity alone. In addition, age, sexuality and interpersonal relationships (e.g. dynamics of 'best friends', conflicts between dyadic and triadic groups, family relationships) all intersect within children's social identities in particular moments. Thus, social identities need to be understood as deeply contextual, relational, and mutually constitutive. Emotions play a significant role for how social identities are invested with meanings and values and produce complex dynamics of belonging and being different.

The study highlights the importance of the educational setting, the policy and legislation context and wider social inequalities for shaping the discourses within which children perform their social identities. Tensions and ambiguities – e.g.

between ‘diversity’ and ‘inequality’ – in the relevant policies and legislations fail to address the different underlying dimensions of social justice in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity, and these tensions are reflected in staff’s discourses and practices, resulting in the foregrounding of certain aspects of diversity and the silencing of others. This study also highlights how through performing social identities in certain ways, wider social inequalities become manifest. Children are aware of and contribute to powerful discourses of social stereotypes and inequalities. Children also engage in the ‘politics of belonging’ (Yuval-Davis, 2011) by constructing dynamics of ‘us’ and ‘them’, engaging in processes of ‘othering’, and drawing boundaries around certain forms of belonging.

The findings of this study emphasise the need for both a reflective practice in educational settings, as well as for policies and legislations to acknowledge and address the complex, intersecting nature of children’s social identities and the multiple dimensions of social justice.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

I begin this section by outlining the scope of this study and situating this research within the particular social and political context in which it took place. I then locate this study within the field of ‘childhood studies’ and present the structure of the thesis.

## 1.1 The scope of this study

This research aims to explore how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of a primary school. There has been a growing interest in research on children’s social identities in recent years. Research has investigated the ways in which children perceive and construct ethnicity (e.g. Troyna and Hatcher, 1992; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001; Connolly, 2003), gender (e.g. Thorne, 1993; Davies, 2003; Renold, 2005) and social class (e.g. Sutton et al., 2007; Streib, 2011). There has been an increasing shift in this body of work towards recognising the interactional, socially constructed nature of children’s social identities, and towards a rejection of notions of identities as essentialized and fixed.

However, as the literature review in this thesis shows, research on children’s social identities often tends to focus on particular aspects of their identities, and there has been a lack of research that explores the ways in which children’s social identities *intersect* (Konstantoni, 2011). This lack of research has been particularly evident with children in the early years of primary school (5-7 year-olds). There is also a need for more research that investigates the ways in which young children *perform* their social identities within specific contexts and relationships (MacNaughton, 2006). Educational settings in particular have been described as ‘key sites for the production and reproduction’ of social identities (Morrow, 2006: 101), yet their

significance in framing and shaping children's social identities has rarely been explored in-depth. These are the gaps which this study seeks to address.

As this study reveals, the ways in which children perform their social identities do not happen in isolation, but are situated within and shaped by discourses in the school context and beyond, including policies, legislation and wider social inequalities. In the following section I provide some background information about this wider social and political context within which this research took place.

## **1.2 Background and context**

Debates about identities and inequalities have marked the social and political landscape in Scotland, and the United Kingdom (UK) more widely, in recent years. Political arenas which brought such discussions to the fore included, amongst others, debates on immigration, the UK's place in the European Union, and the run-up to the Scottish independence referendum in which campaigners on both sides highlighted issues around identities and social justice. The educational system, and children's experiences within it, have taken a key place in such debates in terms of issues of access, resources and values (e.g. expressed in debates about 'British values' in education (see for example Cameron, 2014; Wintour, 2014)). Today, the UK is often described as 'superdiverse' (e.g. Vertovec, 2007; Stringer, 2014), yet these social and political debates are frequently marked by a language of 'us' and 'them', and constructions of 'the other' (Ahmed, 2004b; Yuval-Davis, 2011). This research took place during a time of rising anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments, expressed for example in the growing popularity of extremist parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and their racist and homophobic political rhetoric and programmes. Heightened socio-economic inequalities, in a climate of 'austerity politics' following the 2008 global financial crisis, represented another social division in policy and media debates, which became evident, for example, in the

labelling of particular social groups as the ‘undeserving poor’ or in moral panics about ‘benefit scroungers’ at the time of the research.

The Scottish context presents a particular picture in terms of its policy landscape and demographic characteristics. A number of Scottish policies and frameworks were implemented in recent years which illustrate the Scottish Government’s commitment to issues of equality and diversity, as discussed in detail in Chapter 4. A particular focus has been placed on the early years of children’s lives, with the Early Years Framework, launched in 2008, aiming to break cycles of inequalities in relation to health, education and employment opportunities through early intervention (Scottish Government, 2008a). The fieldwork of this research was conducted only a year after the implementation of the new Scottish educational Curriculum for Excellence (introduced in 2010), as well as the recent Equality Act (2010) which brought together previous equality legislations in Great Britain. As this study shows, children’s social identities are socially constructed and performed, yet wider social inequalities are, despite such existing equality legislation, real and persistent.

Socio-economic inequalities in Scotland have remained persistently high in recent years, and social class remains a key aspect in shaping children’s lives (McKendrick et al., 2014). For example, young people from working-class backgrounds continue to be less likely to go to university than young people from higher social class backgrounds (Croxford and Raffe, 2014). This research took place in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis, which impacted on the lives of children and families. In the UK, it led to the introduction of austerity measures in relation to welfare, education and health policies, and children have been described as disproportionately affected by the crisis (Ruxton, 2012). The impact on children’s lives has been characterized as twofold: on the one hand, increasing unemployment has reduced incomes and increased the risk of poverty for families; on the other hand, an increased emphasis on reducing state deficits has led to cutbacks in services for children and families and measures such as income support benefits (Frazer and Marlier, 2012).

Gender remains a significant aspect of social inequalities in the UK, and Scotland. These inequalities are evidenced in children's lives, amongst other fields, through their experiences in schools. In Scotland, there still exist significant and complex gender-related inequalities in education and professional trajectories. Scottish schools rarely have gender policies in place, and Scottish young people continue to choose gender-stereotyped career paths (Scottish Executive, 2007). Gender has been described as an 'invisible' category in recent Scottish policies on inclusion in education, and there has been a call to end the 'systemic, structural and institutional' silencing of gender within educational policies and practices (Forbes et al., 2011: 766). On average, girls outperform boys at *all* levels in school (Scottish Executive, 2007), yet they go on to face a gender pay gap of 15.5% in full-time, and 34.5% in part-time work (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011).

According to the Scottish Government (2014), the Scottish context is characterised by relatively low ethnic diversity, with the minority ethnic<sup>1</sup> population making up only 4% of the Scottish population. Most minority ethnic groups live in the larger Scottish cities, and each local authority has their own distinctive minority ethnic profiles. The minority ethnic population in Scotland has been growing in recent years, and has a younger age profile than the overall population. Arshad et al. (2004: 14) suggest that, while most minority ethnic children in Scotland have the experience of attending 'mainly white' schools (including the profile of the teaching staff), there are also 'clusters' with high minority ethnic populations, such as in the case of the school of this research.

Thus, although issues of equality and diversity are high on the agenda in UK, and particularly Scottish policies and political rhetoric, particular inequalities continue to persist. At the same time, Scottish society is becoming increasingly diverse, and this

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis I use the term 'minority ethnic' to describe ethnic groups who are 'in the minority within a defined population on the grounds of 'race', colour, culture, language or nationality'. I favour the term 'minority ethnic' over 'ethnic minority', since the latter suggests 'that the minority or marginalised status of such a group arises from its 'possession' of ethnicity itself, rather than the low value ascribed to its particular ethnicity in the wider, 'majority' cultural/ethnic environment' (Arshad et al, 2005: iv-vi).

shapes the particular social and political context of this research and makes Scotland an interesting context in which to explore how children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity.

### 1.3 A ‘childhood studies’ perspective

This thesis is located within the academic field of the ‘new’ social studies of childhood, a research paradigm which emerged in the 1990s as a critical response to dominant developmental perspectives on childhood (Qvortrup, 1994; Prout and James, 1997; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002; James and James, 2004). The adjective ‘new’ generally serves to position the field as an alternative to these previous ways of conceptualising and researching childhood, although there appears to be a growing unease about this ‘newness’ as an increasing number of internal and external critiques illustrates (Tisdall and Punch, 2012). Therefore, throughout this thesis I refer to this academic field as ‘childhood studies’.

While it has been one of the key contributions of the childhood studies field to draw attention to our ontological (what *is* a child?) and epistemological (how can we *know* about children and childhoods?) positions as researchers, and their influence on our research (Gallagher, 2009a), there seems to be a general consensus in how writers in the field position themselves in relation to these questions. These key tenets of childhood studies, which also inform this thesis, include:

- childhood is seen as a social construct;
- childhood is viewed as a variable of social analysis;
- children are conceptualised as active and competent social actors who take part in the construction of their own childhoods<sup>2</sup>;

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<sup>2</sup> This is related to the notion of children’s agency, which has lately been troubled by childhood researchers (e.g. Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Konstantoni, 2012; Oswell, 2013), a point to which I return later in this thesis.



- children's cultures and relationships are worthy of study in their own right; and
- ethnography is particularly suited as a methodological approach for the study of childhood (Qvortrup et al., 1994; Jenks, 1996; Prout and James, 1997; James et al., 1998).

This conceptualisation of children and childhood(s) implies a shift from seeing children as 'becomings' to viewing them as 'human beings' (Qvortrup, 1994)<sup>3</sup>, which has also led to a greater recognition of children's human rights, particularly civil and political rights (Tisdall, 2012). In research, this is evidenced through a growing call for children's participation in research which is not conducted *on* children, but *with* and *by* children. There is a close affinity between the childhood studies field, which stresses children's *ability* to take part in research, and the children's rights field, which stresses children's *entitlement* to participation (in research and beyond), in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Lundy and McEvoy, 2012).

The above tenets of the growing and interdisciplinary social studies of childhood have directed the sociological gaze of the field towards a 'micro-orientation' (Qvortrup, 2000: 78) resulting in a wide range of studies focusing on children's everyday lives in different contexts (Konstantoni and Kustatscher, forthcoming). This study contributes to this body of work and adds to debates about understanding children's social identities by suggesting that research needs to go beyond children's everyday experiences and also include a focus on the importance of wider social relations.

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that this often drawn-upon distinction has been critiqued as unhelpful, since both adults and children can be seen as 'becomings' due to the nature of their ever changing and unstable lives and identities (Lee, 2001).

## 1.4 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, in Chapter 2 I provide a review of the relevant literature and situate this thesis in relation to theoretical debates. I begin by summarizing empirical research on children's social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity. I identify the gaps in knowledge and discuss the theoretical frameworks employed in this body of literature. I then outline a theoretical framework that makes it possible to address the identified gaps, and that underpins this research, namely a framework based on a discussion of the concepts of social identities, agency and intersectionality. The Chapter provides a rationale for the aim of this study and concludes with the research questions that it seeks to explore.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological approach taken in this study. I outline my ontological and epistemological stance, and present the rationale for an ethnographic research design. I provide a reflexive account of the implementation of this research design, and give particular attention to my roles and social identities in the field, as well as to ethical challenges arising in the course of fieldwork. I conclude the Chapter by presenting the process of analysis.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the research context and sets out the main features of the setting within which the children in this study performed their social identities. I describe the neighbourhood and social context of Greenstone Primary<sup>4</sup> and the relevant legislative and policy landscape on a global, UK, Scottish, local authority and school level. I then explore how this context generates particular discourses on diversity and inequality which result in specific ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity are constructed in staff's discourses and practices in the school context.

Chapters 5 and 6 present and discuss the substantive findings of this research. In Chapter 5, I explore how the children perform their social identities in relation to

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<sup>4</sup> The name of the school, as well as of all children and staff, are pseudonyms.

social class, gender and ethnicity. I draw attention to how particular social identities are foregrounded at different times and in different situations and how wider social inequalities become manifest in the children's performing of their social identities. While drawing out the salience of social class, gender and ethnicity respectively, I also acknowledge the ways in which each of these categories intersects with others in complex ways.

In Chapter 6, I explore this complexity further by looking at children's social identities of belonging and being different in the primary school context. I draw attention to the role of emotions in how social identities and groups come to be invested with meanings and values and discuss the ways in which relational, interpersonal dynamics intersect with forms of belonging and being different in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I summarise the findings of this study, answer the research questions, and discuss the implications that arise from this research for existing debates in the academic field, for policy and practice, and for further research.

Before embarking on the journey of this study, it is necessary to point out a tension that permeates this thesis in relation to its structure and content, namely the tension between retaining a focus on social class, gender and ethnicity as three particular aspects of children's social identities, and at the same time deconstructing these very categories through an intersectional framework which views them as constitutive of each other. Although this research makes a case for an *intersectional* understanding of children's social identities, it does at various points throughout also retain a focus on social class, gender and ethnicity respectively. The literature review, for example, represents the empirical findings in relation to children's social identities by focusing on class, gender and ethnicity consecutively, and this reflects indeed the way in which children's social identities have been conceptualised and researched in most of the relevant literature. Also Chapter 5 foregrounds social class, gender and ethnicity respectively (whilst acknowledging other aspects of social identities as they come into view), whereas Chapter 6 disrupts the 'tripartite' structure by focusing on intersections, emotions and values. The reasons for this tension are twofold: First, I

use the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity as starting points for mapping social relations (as explained in more detail in Chapter 3), and explore how they are performed in children's lives by drawing attention to processes of both their construction and de-construction. Second, in keeping with discussions about 'identity politics' (e.g. Hughes, 2002), retaining a focus on identities of class, gender and ethnicity respectively also serves the strategic aim of being able to make political claims about the implications of this research for specific aspects of policy and practice.

## **Chapter 2: Researching children's social identities – literature review and theoretical framework**

In this Chapter I provide a review of the literature on children's social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity, and develop the rationale and theoretical framework for this study.

I begin by discussing the literatures on children and social class, gender and ethnicity respectively. I draw out the contributions of various key studies, and explore the empirical findings of this literature as well as how research has been framed theoretically and conceptually in these respective fields. I conclude each section with discussing the body of work and identifying the respective gaps.

I then summarise the overall gaps that arise from the current state of the literature on children's social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity. I locate this thesis in relation to theoretical debates in the literature, and discuss the concepts of social identities and intersectionality. In this way, this Chapter is both a literature review as well as a theoretical chapter, since the two are seen as inextricably linked. I conclude with the aim of this study and the research questions that it seeks to explore.

### **2.1 A comment on searching the literature**

The focus of this literature review – children's social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity – is relatively wide and this is reflected in the huge diversity of the research identified. Thus, it is important to acknowledge some of the main differences, and tensions, within this body of literature:

- Different *ontological and theoretical lenses in relation to identities*: Studies included in this chapter define the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity in different ways, and are framed not only through a social identity lens, but also using various other concepts such as relationships, friendships, discrimination, or inequalities. I strive to provide a comment on these different lenses, and their impact on the knowledges produced, throughout.
- Different *conceptualisations of childhood*: Since this research is framed by a childhood studies lens, which recognises children's competencies and stresses the importance of studying childhood in its own right (James and Prout, 1997), I have focused in particular, and whenever available, on studies which have sought to explore children's views and interactions, resulting in a focus on particular *methodologies* (mainly qualitative and specifically ethnographic research). However, I have also included studies which did not use an (explicit) childhood studies lens, if they were deemed relevant to the focus of this Chapter.
- Different *age groups*: Since research with the particular age group of this study (5-7 year-olds) is relatively limited (as this literature review reveals), research with younger and older children has been included if it were deemed particularly relevant in its focus.
- Different *countries of origin*: Due to the geographical context of this research, particular weight was given to studies from Scotland and the United Kingdom. However, a significant amount of studies from other countries of the Minority World<sup>5</sup> has been included (Europe, US and Australia). The review was limited to English language publications.

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<sup>5</sup> The terms 'Minority World' and 'Majority World' are used in this thesis in order to acknowledge that the majority of the world's population – and particularly of the world's children – live in what was formerly known as the 'third world', that is Africa, Asia and Latin America. In keeping with Punch (2003) and Punch and Tisdall (2012), this terminology seeks to recognise that, from a global perspective, the generally privileged childhoods of 'first world' countries are actually in the minority. This terminology does not seek to homogenize distinctions between different cultures, but aims at challenging the normative and dominant perspectives of 'Western' views on childhood.

- Different *disciplines*: Research in this review draws on a number of disciplines, namely childhood studies, children's geographies, education, 'race' and ethnicity studies, sociology and social policy.

In order to retain and make explicit the wide variety of the reviewed literature, I have summarised key studies and their respective methodologies, participants etc. individually throughout this chapter.

## 2.2 Research on children and social class

This section begins by providing insights into debates on social class in the wider sociological literature, before positioning the area of research on children and social class within this field. It then summarises research that has sought children's perspectives on social class differences. This is followed by a review of the literature on how children's lives are shaped through classed parenting practices and experiences of schooling. Since there is a relative absence of research in the field of children and social class with young children, I have also included studies with older children and young people (up until 17). Most of the studies included in this section are from the UK and the US.

Given the focus of this thesis, my main interest in this section lies on *qualitative* studies on children and social class. However, many of the qualitative studies reviewed also draw on quantitative research in order to contextualise the structural dimensions of their findings. Such research includes, for example, how children can be affected by poverty, e.g. by revealing how poor children lack essential items (Gordon et al., 2000) which may lead to processes of self-exclusion and reduced aspirations in the face of constrained circumstances (Middleton et al., 1994; Shropshire and Middleton, 1999)<sup>6</sup>.

### 2.2.1 Debates on social class and the 'cultural turn'

Recent decades have seen heated sociological debates about the relevance and definition of social class in contemporary societies. While some theorists have argued that social class has lost its relevance for shaping people's lives (Beck, 1992;

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<sup>6</sup> A noteworthy large-scale longitudinal research project in the Scottish context is the Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) (2014) study which, since 2003, tracks the lives of several cohorts of Scottish children from the early years onwards. The study provides information on how parents' income and level of education relate to a number of issues, such as child health and well-being, childcare, parenting styles, children's experiences of school etc.



Pakulski and Waters, 1996), others have suggested a move away from focusing solely on material aspects (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998; Devine et al., 2005). There is a tension between defining social class in terms of material or economic *inequalities* on the one hand, and in terms of symbolic practices and *identities* on the other hand, and discussions centre on how the relationship between these two can be conceptualised. Recently, these debates have been characterised by a ‘cultural turn’ in understandings of social class, that is, a focus on the symbolic aspects of social class (Lawler, 2005). As Bradley states,

class is a social category which refers to lived relations surrounding social arrangements of production, exchange, distribution and consumption. While these may narrowly be conceived as economic relationships, to do with money wealth and property, [...] it is suggested that class should be seen as referring to a much broader web of social relationships, including, for example, lifestyle, educational experience and patterns of residence. (Bradley, 1996: 19)

Some writers have argued that, although material inequalities have widened in recent decades, social class is no longer a ‘major source of identity and group belonging’ (Savage, 2000: 40). This claim is supported by qualitative studies that show a decline of the significance of social class identities, illustrated for example through people’s refusal to place themselves within social classes or their rejection of class labels (Reay, 1997; Skeggs, 1997). Research has also showed that people are ambivalent in the meanings that they accord to social class: they often use social class to explain wider social conditions, but not their own personal lives, which they rather seek to classify as just ‘ordinary’ (Savage et al., 2001). However, it has been suggested that the very absence of class in everyday discourses and identifications can be ‘taken as a *sign* of class in action, with class now encoded in implicit ways’ (Bottero and Irwin, 2003: 470, original emphasis). Also Savage (2000: 102) suggests that, even if experienced in highly individualised, implicit and ‘unselfconscious’ ways, social class continues to shape people’s cultural practices and social class cultures can now be seen as ‘modes of differentiation rather than as types of collectivity’. There has thus been a move away from

looking for *class* consciousness, but rather *classed* consciousness, in which the recognition of social divisions – or rather social distance – is embedded in practice. (Bottero, 2004: 993, my emphasis)

This research is located within this cultural understanding of social class, however, without neglecting the importance of economic inequalities. Skeggs (1997) suggests that social class is *rooted* in economic and material inequalities and *lived* as cultural practices which are ascribed symbolic values and meanings. Thus, while social class is seen as *embedded* in economic inequalities, it is also defined as ‘practices of living’ and shared cultural expectations (Weis, 2008b: 2):

While class certainly has its roots in economic realities, individuals and collectivities create and live class in response to such realities, and families and schools are important mediators in this regard. Such recognition of both the structuring effects of class and the ways in which class is lived out has never been more pressing, given key shifts in the global economy and accompanying deepening social inequalities. (Weis, 2008a: 2-3)

Some examples of profoundly classed experiences, according to Weis, are: which schools we go to, with whom and with what expectations, if and where we go on holiday, modes of travel, place and nature of housing, if and where we apply to university, with what success and financing etc. This detailed attention given to cultural practices of social class has also led to an increased focus on how class is lived in both racialized and gendered ways (Skeggs, 1997; Reay, 1998; Bottero and Irwin, 2003).

Despite the proliferation of such debates in the sociological literature on social class, research on children and social class takes place mostly outside these theoretical discussions. However, the childhood studies field is nonetheless influenced by these discussions, as the following sections show, particularly in relation to whether social class is conceptualised in economic/material terms, or as cultural and symbolic practices and identities.

## **2.2.2 Children's views on social class differences**

In this section I review studies which have sought to explore children's views on social class differences. I begin by drawing out the characteristics of early studies framed by positivist understandings, and show how certain assumptions about research on children and social class still prevail to date (e.g. viewing children as passively acquiring fixed social class positions). I then move on to discuss research which has sought children's understandings of social class differences by inquiring about their own views.

### **2.2.2.1 Positivist beginnings: assessing children's social class 'awareness'**

The earliest attempts at studying children's perceptions of social class and their own class positionings date back to the 1950s. Research initially consisted of positivist approaches which tried to assess whether children were able to identify their own and others' social class 'correctly' by using questionnaires or strongly structured interviews (Stendler, 1949; Centres, 1950; Phillips, 1950; Himmelweit et al., 1952; Jahoda, 1953; 1959). Social class was conceptualised through the idea of clearly distinguishable working, middle and upper classes, defined through income and occupational status of parents (thus, relying heavily on economic rather than cultural aspects of social class). An example is Jahoda's (1953) study of adolescents leaving secondary school in Lancashire, in which he developed a 'social class scale'. It consisted of a wooden board which indicated examples of members of different social classes at the top ('bishops, judges, lords') and bottom ('gipsies, tramps'). With a movable pointer on the side, the young people were asked to indicate their own class position on the scale, which was assessed against their parents' social class. Jahoda (1953: 107) observed, for example, a strong working-class loyalty for boys. Girls tended to 'overrate' their own social position and were more ambitious in terms of social mobility, which he classified as a 'less realistic' perception of their social class positions and aspirations.

These early studies were characterised by judgemental attitudes towards social class with ethically contentious consequences for the participants. For example, Himmelweit et al. (1952: 152) set out to study the hypothesis that boys in Grammar

Schools would have ‘greater intellectual maturity’ compared to boys in Modern Schools. In all of the above mentioned studies, researchers had predefined different social class groups and put them in a hierarchical order, and the young people’s own constructions of social class were not acknowledged. This shows that, although the researchers aimed at exploring children’s perceptions of social class, the children’s perspectives were not truly valued since they were perceived as inferior to adult views. For example, Centres (1950: 301) observed that ‘maturity, as indicated by age, is significantly related to class consciousness, and immaturity accounts for some of the observed upward direction of identification’. In most cases, if children’s perceptions of their own social class positions did not match the adult researchers’ assessments, they were judged as incorrect.

Two seminal studies on children and social class, which influenced the sociology of class more widely, were the works by Bernstein and Willis. These studies reflected a much more differentiated view of social class and the subtle processes involved in social class identity and reproduction. Bernstein’s (1970; 1971) sociolinguistic research showed how social class identity is reflected in people’s use of language codes. He argued that, depending on their families’ social class backgrounds, children have different access to language codes, with children from middle-class backgrounds being able to use an elaborated code (which is also used and valued in educational environments) as opposed to the restricted code available to working-class children. A similar sensitivity to the cultural dimensions of social class is exemplified in Willis’ (1977) ethnographic study of a group of twelve working-class boys in an English Secondary School. Willis argued that ‘the lads’ formed a counter-culture within the school, which opposed the norms and values of conformist, middle-class pupils and at the same time led to the reproduction of their own working class positions. He also drew attention to the gendered dimensions of social class, arguing that the boys’ constructions of masculine identities led them to reject the non-manual careers for which educational qualifications were necessary, because they associated them with middle-class and feminine values and identities.

Although research on children’s social class has become more differentiated since the 1950s, some methodological practices still prevail in certain studies. For

example, it is still common for researchers to predefine social class markers and seek children's views on them. Weinger (2000: 135), for example, used 'projective techniques' in her qualitative study with 5-14 year-old children from different social backgrounds in the US, which involved showing them 'photographs of houses representing different income level families'. The children were asked to make character judgements about the people living in the different types of houses, and which of the inhabiting children they would want to be friends with. Weinger concluded that the poor children in her sample were more able to identify with the assumed poor families in the pictures, whereas the middle class children exhibited negative stereotypical judgements about 'the poor'. Both groups of children tended to select children from 'their own' social class as potential friends. In a similar study with 5-11 year-old children in Northern Ireland, Horgan (2009) showed photographs of different houses and asked the participants to imagine the children living in them, and their experiences at school. From the children's responses to the photographs, she concluded that children's 'awareness of social difference' emerged from seven years of age onwards. Children below that age had suggested that children's experiences in school would be 'the same' irrespective of the houses they lived in, whereas children over seven 'could see that life at school would be easier for the child from the big house' (369).

While this kind of research can be useful for understanding to what extent children are aware of and participating in social discourses and stereotyping about social class differences, it runs the risk of reproducing exactly such stereotypes. The above described examples (e.g. Centres, 1950; Himmelweit et al., 1952; Jahoda, 1959; Weinger, 2000; Horgan, 2009) employ hierarchical conceptualizations of social class with highly normative implications (e.g. children from lower social classes are expected to inevitably experience difficulties at school). They also assume class identity to be static and fixed, and children's social class identities to be predetermined by their family and environment. Thus, this kind of research fails to provide insights into how children construct their own social class identities in everyday lives in more complex ways. This latter type of research is relatively rare, especially in relation to young children, and there has been a call for more

participatory research, particularly in relation to children's experiences of poverty (Ridge, 2003; Bennett and Roberts, 2004; Sime, 2008). The studies reviewed in the following section provide some key examples of how children's own views have been sought in relation to social class differences.

#### **2.2.2.2 Children's views on social class differences – contrasting lives**

Children's own views on social class differences have been sought mostly through research with children from contrasting backgrounds (in terms of poverty and wealth), and through interview research. For example, Ridge's (2002) qualitative study of forty children (aged 10-17) living in low-income families in the UK explored their accounts of everyday life. She framed her research as a child-centred study which aimed to bring children's own perspectives into academic and policy discourses around poverty. Key findings from the study included the importance of money in relation to 'small measures of freedom' such as children's small possessions and necessities (e.g. clothes, sweets), social life and particularly transport (Ridge, 2002: 57)<sup>7</sup>. These issues were directly related to children's peer friendships and participation at in- and out-of-school events. The children were very aware that their exclusion (often also self-exclusion if costs were perceived as too high to even approach parents) from such activities was affecting their school involvement, particularly in final years with extra costs for trips and projects. Material hardship also led to high pressures for the children, for example in relation to wearing the 'right' clothing, and issues around bullying (see also Ridge, 2011). With regards to social and leisure time, limited access to resources meant that children were unable to participate in shared organised activities. They also expressed concerns about safety and traffic in their neighbourhoods. Many children in the study did not have the opportunity to go on family holidays, or often, in single-

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<sup>7</sup> In an earlier study (Davis and Ridge, 1997), the particular difficulties of children living in rural areas were identified, especially in relation to transport: getting to places and making friendships was difficult for children living on low incomes due to long physical distances. Another perception of the rural children was to feel observed and censured within their small local communities but at the same time powerless when it came to asserting their interests ('being seen but not heard').

parent families, such holidays were only possible with the non-resident parent or grandparents (see also Millar and Ridge, 2013).

Overall, Ridge's study showed that the children had a considerable awareness of their families' financial situations and particularly girls were often trying to protect their parents (for example through denial of their own needs and aspirations). All the children were aware of the impact of poverty on their lives, whether they had experienced the advent of poverty through life events such as family illness, disability or breakdown, or whether a life in poverty was all they had known. For some children, fears about material insecurity in the present were strongly related to fears and uncertainty about their futures.

A similar picture is painted by Sutton et al.'s (2007; Sutton, 2008; 2009) participatory research study that explored the perspectives of forty-two children, aged 8-13 years, from different socio-economic backgrounds, in two different social locations in England (one group from a disadvantaged housing estate and one group from a fee-paying independent school). The research involved group sessions including drawing, mapping and writing activities as well as games and role play. It found that the children did not perceive themselves as being rich or poor but tended to position themselves on a middle ground, stressing the importance of 'being normal' or 'not being different' (Sutton et al., 2007: 10). Nevertheless, all the participants were able to identify social differences and, when invited to reflect upon them, appreciated that people were not necessarily responsible for their own circumstances. Similar to Ridge's (2002) emphasis on the crucial role of the school, also Sutton et al. found that education was one of the key areas in which the lives of children from different socio-economic backgrounds differed most. Among children from disadvantaged backgrounds, negative attitudes to school were more common. This impacted not only on their perceptions of school lessons but also on their use of extended school programmes. A similar difference extended to the children's free-time play. While private schoolchildren tended to be involved in organised and often commercialised play and sports activities, the estate children were more likely to spend their free time on the streets and other available open spaces. As a consequence, children from a low socio-economic background playing on the streets

were negatively affected by the loss of public space used as building land (Sutton et al. 2007; see also Gallagher, 2006). Sutton (2009: 288) argues that although both groups of children shared some elements in their world-views (e.g. the importance of favourite belongings or of fitting in), their socio-economic backgrounds and particular environments profoundly affected 'their understanding of who they are and simultaneously who they are not'.

This is in contrast with findings by Backett-Milburn et al. (2003), whose study revealed that children emphasised social class similarities over differences, and stressed the importance of having control over their own lives – despite differences in terms of choices and opportunities. The research with 9-12 year-old children focused on their understandings of social and health inequalities. Thirty-five children from an affluent and a deprived area in a large Scottish city were interviewed in their homes. The study found that children differentiated between material inequalities and inequalities in social life and relationships. While the children stressed the importance of material circumstances, they often foregrounded relational dimensions as more important to their lives: having friends, not being bullied, and being cared for by parents. Children from the deprived area challenged the idea that material inequalities would have an effect on their lives, whereas children from the affluent area played down their wealth.

In order to fill a gap in relation to very affluent children's perspectives on social class inequalities, Johnson and Hagerman (2006) interviewed twenty 5-12 year-old children from privileged, white families in the US to gauge their understandings of their own social class positioning, their awareness of stratification, and their explanations or justifications for such differences. The researchers interviewed the children in their family homes, using drawings in order to contribute to a 'child-friendly' research setting. Similar to previous studies, all the participants situated themselves 'in the middle', 'in between' or 'not rich and not poor' (Johnson and Hagerman, 2006: 7). The children dissociated themselves particularly vehemently from the status of being 'rich' or 'wealthy', which the researchers explained through the fact that they were evading a sense of responsibility or guilt coming with their privileged positions. However, being rich was associated with being 'happy',



whereas being poor was linked to being 'sad'. The children resisted talking about what experiencing poverty may be like, and the researchers claimed that this was because they had no substantive knowledge of what it means to be poor. The children had high aspirations for their future in terms of professions and wealth. All participants related their families' positions, and high socio-economic positions in general, to individual merit ('hard work') instead of structural inequalities (2006: 15).

The studies reviewed in this section all employed a polarised view on social class differences, conducting research with either children living in poverty (Ridge, 2002), privileged children (Johnson and Hagerman, 2006), or contrasting (but non-interacting) groups of children (Backett-Milburn et al., 2003; Sutton et al., 2007). Nevertheless, there are overlaps in the children's responses. A striking commonality is that the children in all the reviewed studies made an effort to locate themselves on a middle ground in terms of social class, and this resonates strongly with Savage et al.'s (2001: 889) findings from research with adults, who overwhelmingly positioned themselves as 'normal', 'ordinary' or 'just themselves'. However, as Savage et al. suggest, this very stressing of the 'normal' suggests that there is some kind of 'other' in relation to which this ordinariness is constructed, and thus social class appears to be present and relevant *implicitly*.

Economic realities were of key importance in the above studies, but children repeatedly pointed out the significance of other, non-material aspects: relationships with family and peers, emotional well-being and issues around participation. Recurrently, school appeared as a key site where classed differences came to life. While the studies touched on cultural dimensions of social class, e.g. children's experiences in school, leisure times or holidays, they did not investigate those practices in themselves. In the following section, I provide examples of studies which sought to investigate this everyday dimension of social class in children's lived experiences.

### **2.2.3 Social class in children's everyday lives**

In the previous section I have summarized studies which have sought to explore children's views on social class differences and identities, mainly through interviews. In this section, I provide examples of studies which have investigated how social class shapes children's everyday lives, and have followed this focus mainly through ethnographic approaches.

#### **2.2.3.1 Social capital and 'parenting'**

A substantial amount of research on how children's everyday lives are shaped by social class is conceptually framed by a Bourdieusian capital approach, particularly using the concepts of social and cultural capital. For Bourdieu (1986), economic capital underpins all other types of capital. As social capital he describes people's social networks and connections, the

contacts and group memberships which, through the accumulation of exchanges, obligations and shared identities, provide actual or potential support and access to valued resources. (Bourdieu, 1993: 143)

Cultural capital, on the other hand, includes institutionalised forms, such as academic qualifications, and embodied forms, such as self-confidence, certain styles and forms of self-presentation, and knowledge of social etiquettes (Bourdieu, 1984). The family is ascribed key importance in the transmission of capital onto children, and often children are viewed as 'successful or unsuccessful products of adult socialization' (Leonard, 2005: 606). Research using Bourdieusian frameworks therefore tends to draw particular attention to the role of parents and processes of childrearing, recently increasingly referred to through the neologism of 'parenting'.

A key example of this kind of research is Lareau's (2000; 2002; 2003a; 2003b) body of work that draws on her two-year ethnography with eighty-eight children aged 7-10 and their families in a large city in the US. The sample consisted of equal numbers of children and families from a mainly white middle-class suburban community, a mainly white working-class area and a poor mainly Black area. One of the particular features of this study was that it combined data gathered in the children's homes

(including overnight visits), schools, church, organised play, medical appointments and family visits. Data included participant observation and interviews with children, parents and teachers. Lareau's (2000: 166) main argument is that the children's lives were structured differently depending on their social class backgrounds, with different rhythms and 'patterns of waiting, dependence and synchronicity with their parents'. Working-class children tended to spend their free time informally and 'hanging out' with friends and relatives, whereas middle-class children's leisure time tended to be filled with organised activities and focused on skills-development. Lareau (2002: 748) described this as a process of 'concerted cultivation', which involved middle-class parents (particularly mothers) creating a wide range of experiences for their children, although this created 'a frenetic pace for parents, a cult of individualism within the family, and an emphasis on children's performance'. Parents' communication styles with both teachers and their children differed depending on social class, e.g. middle-class parents assumed a position of mutuality and negotiated interests and discipline issues with their children. This led to children asserting their positions in different ways, with middle-class children being 'more skilled' in putting pressure on authority persons in schools in order to accommodate their needs (Lareau, 2003b, see also Bennett et al., 2008). On the other hand, Lareau (2002: 748-9) described the childrearing practices of Black and white working-class and poor parents as emphasising the 'accomplishment of natural growth', expressed in the belief that if parents 'provide love, food, and safety, their children will grow and thrive'.

Lareau's work resonates with an ethnographic study with 4-year-olds in a US-American pre-school setting by Streib (2011), who claimed that younger children also take part in social class reproduction processes in school. The participants were sixteen pre-schoolers in a 'class diverse' setting. Through parents' education and occupational status, as well as the children's scholarship status, Streib determined the class position of the participants. The study echoed Lareau's (2003b) findings that middle-class children were more assertive in interactions with parents and teachers than working-class children, and that middle-class children's lives were highly structured and premeditated. Streib focused particularly on linguistic aspects,

drawing parallels to Bernstein's (1971) research in claiming that middle-class children were using a more elaborated linguistic code. This involved, for example, explaining background details to their listener rather than assuming that they would know them. Middle-class children were described as able to 'take the floor', and even interrupt others through 'sanctioned' practices, and thus mobilised power in complex ways, resulting in working-class children being silenced. Streib also argued that teachers reinforced such classed dynamics through constructing and valuing social class differences and this took the form of a *circular* process, giving more advantages to the already advantaged children.

A British perspective on structurally different types of childrearing is given by Vincent and Ball's (2007) interview study with seventy-one parents (mainly mothers) from two middle-class areas in London, which explores parental strategies for social class reproduction for their children under 5 years of age. The research did not involve children themselves as participants (and it could be argued that this illustrates in fact the position of children within a Bourdieusian framework). Vincent and Ball's findings confirmed Lareau's (2003b) observed processes of 'concerted cultivation' in middle-class parenting. However, the study views the 'enrichment activities' in which parents enrolled their children (e.g. sport and music education) as part of families' wider culture of consumption. It emphasizes that parents' perceived duties in relation to social class reproduction for their children are highly influenced by market and state discourses of 'good parenting', which ultimately place responsibilities to make the 'right' choices on parents themselves. The authors describe this as an 'effort of endless responsibility, fuelled by the market, provoked by the state and driven by social competition in a context of social and technological risk' (Vincent and Ball, 2007: 1074). Middle-class reproduction was no longer perceived as certainty by parents in the study, but was deeply infused with feelings of anxieties and risks, pointing towards the complexity of classed reproduction processes involving more than family practices.

### 2.2.3.2 Critiques of Bourdieusian approaches

The work of Bourdieu has been useful for understanding families' different possessions and activations of different forms of capital, and how 'class-based distinctions and identifications are realised within the everyday interweaving of diverse tapestries of behaviour' (Vincent et al., 2008: 8). However, it has also given rise to a number of critiques, particularly in relation to (1) the conceptualisation of children within Bourdieusian frameworks, (2) underlying normative assumptions about social class and forms of capital, and (3) its neglect of other aspects of difference, such as gender and ethnicity. In this section, I illustrate these critiques using examples of the above studies.

Critics of Bourdieu have claimed that his framework entails a view of individual, isolated subjects who are overly determined by 'objective' structures (King, 2000; Lovell, 2000). Indeed, although both Lareau's and Streib's research concedes some capacity to children to contribute to how they participate in constructions of social class with their parents, teachers and peers, they both rely heavily on class *reproduction* processes. This view is particularly in contrast with many writers in childhood studies, who claim that children are competent social actors (Prout and James, 1997). Bourdieusian approaches have been criticised for downplaying children's agency, for overemphasising the influence (and responsibility) of parents, and for neglecting the wider socio-cultural influences on children. It has been argued that the social capital research field needs to move beyond adult-centred perspectives and explore how children contribute to the shaping of their own environments (Morrow, 1999)<sup>8</sup>.

Bourdieu's work, or at least some appropriations of it, have also been criticised as elitist, conceptualising working-classness as a state of lacking or as a form of cultural deprivation (Morrow, 1999; Jenkins, 2007; Bradley, 2014). Also Lareau's (2003b)

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<sup>8</sup> As an attempt to draw attention to children's own resources, Chin and Phillips (2004: 187) have introduced the concept of 'child capital' which includes children's human capital (e.g. particular skills), social capital (networks with peers and adults in school, neighbourhood, etc.) and cultural capital (knowledge about childhood and children's activities that adults do not possess).

and Streib's (2011) studies appear to rely on unreflected, normative definitions of different forms of capital, implying a moral superiority of middle-class practices, and assuming a deficit view of working-class practices. Streib (2011: 350), for example, looks at children's interactions in pre-school through a normative lens which favours (what she defines as) middle-class practices, illustrated in her descriptions of middle-class children as 'learning more language' (suggesting a 'quantification' of language as a marker of class), 'winning the attention they were seeking' and 'winning power over the verbal space and the material objects'. Working-class children, on the other hand, are described through a vocabulary of deficit and loss, since they 'lost opportunities to improve their own language skills, lost attention from adults, lost the ability to get their needs met quickly' and 'were at a loss... in terms of power' (Streib, 2011: 350). This illustrates a conceptualisation of social and cultural capital as something that children either have, or have not, rather than acknowledging that there may be different expressions of such capitals, which are valued differently by different people.

An alternative, critical view of normative assumptions about forms of capital is reflected in Roets et al.'s (2013) ethnographic study with thirty-nine children aged 6-12 from poor backgrounds in three Belgian cities, which provides an alternative view on how social class shapes children's leisure time. The research aimed at challenging dominant conceptualisations of leisure time as 'pre-structured activities that are based on adult-centred ideals' (8), which reduce poverty to a lack of social and cultural capital, and view poor children as the passive victims of poor socialisation. On the contrary, Roet et al. found that the children themselves did not share adult moral discourses on the value of time spent in school, family and leisure time, but cherished all sorts of events in their lives which could not be considered as 'conventional leisure time' (5). For example, a 7-year-old boy who spent two hours on a daily bus to special education valued and enjoyed this daily journey and saw it as a time for socialising with his friend. For another boy, spending time with his father at work was one of the most treasured experiences during his holidays. The research thus challenges the moral implications of middle-class discourses of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2002), and suggests that children themselves value

aspects of cultural practices which may deviate from classed norms of structured and adult-driven leisure activities.

Finally, Bourdieu's theories have also been criticised for 'positioning sex/gender, sexuality, and even 'race', as secondary to ... social class' (Lovell, 2000: 12). Although his work is far from promoting essentialism, it has been critiqued for not providing a framework for understanding temporary, contradictory and intersecting identities (Lovell, 2000). Bourdieu's analysis is centred on the economy, and his theories have been criticised for failing to systematically include gender, and in doing so reproducing 'sexist dichotomies' (of women in the private, family spheres and men in the public, paid spheres of life) (McCall, 1992: 852). Similarly, Rollock (2014) suggests that although also 'race' does not appear explicitly in Bourdieu's work, it is quietly present in the form of whiteness and white identities. These critiques are quite evident in Lareau's and Streib's studies. Streib (2011) does not pay attention to any intersections of 'race'/ethnicity or gender. Lareau (2002; 2003b) considers 'race', but concludes that social class is more important in shaping children's lives than 'race', since both Black and white middle-class children in her study displayed a similar sense of entitlement and participated in similar organised leisure activities (although she does acknowledge, however, that *all* Black parents in the study were concerned that their children would experience racist discrimination, and that middle-class Black parents made particular efforts to counter lower expectations towards their children). She thus implies that it is possible to separate out, and prioritize, certain aspects of children's social identities. This assumption also leads her to quite broad generalizations about *all* middle-class and *all* working-class parents' practices, overlooking potential complexities and subtleties.

Thus, while Bourdieusian frameworks have been useful in directing researchers' gazes towards the relatively small field of research on children's experiences of social class in their everyday lives, these examples have showed that such research tends to overly focus on parenting and reproduction practices, often employs unreflected normative conceptualisations of middle- and working-classness, and fails to address the complexity of intersecting social identities.

## **2.2.4 Social class and schooling**

Social and cultural capital approaches have not only been popular in looking at the transmission of social class through parenting practices, but also in the context of educational research. Bourdieu (1986) described schools as particularly important in social class reproduction processes. Research on children and social class in relation to schooling includes issues around children's educational attainment, parental involvement and school choice.

Quantitative research has consistently showed a link between poverty and low educational outcomes for children. However, the relationship between poverty and educational achievement is complex and involves both individual, community and broader structural factors (Raffo et al., 2007). Reay suggests that when it comes to understanding children's differing educational outcomes, the cultural turn in social class conceptualisations is particularly useful:

It is still a question of the level of material and cultural resources that families can bring to their engagement with schooling. But there is also an issue of representation and othering that both feeds into and is fed by social and economic inequalities, and it is here that cultural analyses are needed to complement and augment traditional economic understandings. (Reay, 2006b: 294-295)

Qualitative studies with parents, such as Lareau's (2003a) and Vincent and Ball's (2007) work described earlier, provide insights into the cultural dimensions of different attitudes towards schooling, e.g. in terms of parents' confidence, assertiveness and involvement (see also Reay, 2001; Whitty, 2001). Parents' and children's attitudes towards education, particularly whether they believe that their own actions can have an impact, and their aspirations in terms of higher education, were also shown to influence children's differing performances already in primary school (Goodman and Gregg, 2010).

Children's own perspectives in relation to educational attainment and social class have been sought to a lesser extent. An exception is Kellett and Dar's (2007) study which involved twelve 11-year-old children in primary schools of both an advantaged and disadvantaged area in the UK as active researchers about aspects of



literacy. The research found that children from affluent backgrounds identified a number of favourable circumstances – such as routine support, parental conversations and opportunities to talk about learning, good private learning environments and a lack of distractions – as factors to increase their confidence in their learning and writing skills. Children from poorer backgrounds did not have access to any of these resources, resulting in lower confidence about their academic skills. Particularly disadvantaged were boys from poor backgrounds due to an additional lack of role models in education. Jones' (2013) ethnographic study with 5-8 year-old children in a US American primary school found that much of the mainstream literacy resources normalised class-privilege and thus marginalised students from lower social class backgrounds, pointing towards a further classed dimension of the educational system as a whole.

Research on social class and school choice makes visible the market ideologies and structural aspects of the education system (Ball, 1993; 2003; 2006; Ball et al., 1995). While this field of research primarily explores parental perspectives, few studies have also sought children's views on and experiences of (secondary) school choice procedures. Gustafson's (2011: 199) ethnographic study with 11-year-old children in a Swedish suburban area found that, even though formal school choice was made by parents, it played an important part for the children's social identity work. The research showed children to be 'reflecting agents' in processes of social segregation, constructing groups of 'us' and 'them' in relation to 'good' and 'bad' neighbourhoods. Hollingworth and Archer's (2010) research in London confirmed that the reputation of schools and neighbourhoods impacted on children's identities as learners and their relationships to education, producing feelings of either positive identification or fear and disgust. This resonates with Reay and Lucey (2000b: 97) drawing attention to young people's 'traumatising and demoralising' experiences of unsuccessful secondary school choices.

Summing up, research in the area of social class and education shows complex relationships between social class and educational experiences and outcomes, involving both material and cultural aspects such as parents' and children's differing normative and emotional attitudes towards schooling.

## 2.2.5 Discussion and gaps

This section has summarised research on children and social class, both in relation to children's views about social class differences and their own social class positionings, and in relation to the relevance of social class in children's everyday lives, including experiences of schooling. As outlined at the beginning of this section (2.2.1), there are debates in the literature as to whether social class should be defined in material or cultural terms, and how the relationship between these two can be conceptualised. While few studies draw predominantly on material aspects of social inequalities (Middleton et al., 1994), the majority of studies reviewed in this section can be located within the 'cultural turn' of sociological debates on social class, considering not only material or economic aspects but focusing also on classed practices, attitudes and identities.

Bourdieuian frameworks are prevalent in the literature on children and social class, and thinking with Bourdieu's (1986) 'forms of capital' has been useful in many respects: his theories have been helpful in stressing the continued importance of social class, and in conceptualising the links between the economic, cultural and social aspects of class. For Bourdieu (1986: no pagination), 'the different types of capital can be derived from economic capital' and thus cultural practices of social class are seen as rooted in material and economic aspects. However, I have highlighted the shortcomings of a Bourdieusian approach, namely its conceptualisation of children as the passive products of adult socialisation processes, normative assumptions underlying the value of different forms of capitals, and its neglect of complex, contradicting and intersecting aspects of children's experiences of inequalities and social identities.

All of the studies reviewed in this section have in common that researchers have *positioned* their participants in relation to social class (e.g. describing them as poor, privileged, middle-class, working-class, from contrasting backgrounds etc.) through their sampling processes. Many studies focus on social class 'extremes' of either poverty or wealth, with often non-interacting samples of each group. Thus, although children's or parents' views have been sought, researchers had 'classified' them in

advance of the research. This approach can be seen as useful for drawing out the significance of social class in children's lives (particularly in the context of debates which question the continued importance of social class, e.g. Pakulski and Waters, 1996; Smith, 2000). However, it also implies a view of social class as fixed and tied to the individual, as something that people *have*, rather than *do*. Moreover, positioning their participants in terms of social class, and thus foregrounding this aspect of children's social identities, resulted in conceptualising class in a rather essentialist way in most of the studies.

What is missing from the above studies, and what cannot be achieved within a Bourdieusian framework, is therefore a focus on the way in which social class is performed by children in social interactions, and a concern for the *doing* rather than the stability of children's social class identities. Based on the outlined limitations and criticisms of the reviewed literature, there is thus a gap in relation to research on children's social class identities that

- recognises children's *competence* to contribute to constructions of social class identities, rather than seeing children only as the passive products of classed adult practices,
- goes beyond studying children's *perceptions* of social class as a static and essentialist category, but looks at how children *perform* social class, taking into account complex and relational aspects and intersections with other dimensions of social identity,
- is *reflective* about the different values attached to different classed practices (particularly where children and adult views might differ), rather than assuming a hierarchical view of social class in which children are either endowed with, or lacking, normative forms of classed knowledge and skills.
- Moreover, most of the research in relation to children and social class focuses on middle childhood (from 8 years onwards), and there is thus a gap in exploring younger children's constructing and performing of social class.

## 2.3 Research on children and gender

This section provides an overview of the field of research in relation to children's gender identities and relationships. The section begins by outlining the different ways in which research on gender, and children's gender identities, has been conceptualised. It then moves on to discuss existing research on children's constructions of gender, gendered relationships in particular contexts, and gender and sexuality. Finally, key themes of the field of gender in relation to education are discussed. Particular attention is given to research which focuses on the age group of this research (5-7 year-olds), although research with older children (up until 11) is included due to its high relevance also for the present study. Studies originate from various countries of the Minority World, mainly the UK, US and Australia.

### 2.3.1 Theorising children and gender

Historically, research on children and gender has been framed through *psychological* and *developmental* lenses. Particularly influential were the works of Piaget (1929) and Kohlberg (1966) (both cited in Morrow, 2006: 93) who assumed gender to be an essential category, reached through universal stages of development. Children were thought to notice gender differences at certain ages, understand their own gender label and behave accordingly<sup>9</sup>. Such perspectives entail a *biological* understanding of gender, assuming that gender differences are rooted in biological differences and are therefore genetic, unchangeable and inevitable. Such views fail to explain cultural variations of how gender is lived in different places and at different times (Oakley, 1972) and the heterogeneity of same-sex groups, gender norms and inequalities (Blaise, 2005).

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<sup>9</sup> It is noteworthy that critical voices from within the field of developmental psychology have contributed to the deconstruction of these dominant discourses. Burman (2008, 2012), for example, showed that the discipline of psychology is itself located within discourses of imperialism, colonisation and patriarchy, and therefore as a discipline may contribute to oppressive discourses in relation to gender and 'race' by reproducing them in unquestioned, powerful ways.

In contrast to biological perspectives on gender, *socialisation* theories, also described as *sex role* theories (Skelton and Francis, 2003: 12) have emerged as a way of emphasising the importance of the environment. These theories assume that children learn gender through imitation and modelling. In this framework, adults are therefore seen as particularly influential, and it has been argued that many educational practices implicitly or explicitly reward children for ‘sex-appropriate’ behaviours (for example, if girls are praised for being quiet, or boys are punished for clinging to their mothers when they leave the classroom) (Blaise, 2005: 10).

The perspectives described so far entail a naturalised ‘sponge’ (MacNaughton, 2000: 19) or ‘osmosis’ (Yelland, 2002: 156) model of children’s gender development, and ignore children’s own views and agency. They also put forward a ‘male-female binary’, engrained in Western thought and rooted in social and linguistic structures, which constructs gender through the idea of (only) two antithetical and bipolar sexes (Davies, 2003: xi).

An alternative view of children’s gender identities and development is contained in *gender relational* theories. Viewing gender as relational means to recognise children’s active involvement in constructing its meaning, and to regard gender as fluid rather than fixed (Skelton and Francis, 2003). Relational theories pay close attention to the relationships between individuals, and between individuals and social institutions:

In the process of building identities, the individual and the social world do not just interact – instead they are interdependent and mutually constructing. (MacNaughton, 2000: 24)

Many researchers have drawn on feminist and poststructuralist theories in order to explain how children’s gender identities are constituted through discursive practices in an ongoing process (e.g. MacNaughton, 2000; Paechter, 2001; Davies, 2003; Blaise, 2005; Renold, 2005; Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006). Such views also recognise that gender identities are complex and not only an abstract, cognitive exercise, but also integrally emotional experiences (MacNaughton, 2006: 20).

Two recurring themes in the literature on children's gender identities are Connell's (1995) concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, and the notion of *heteronormativity*, which draws on Butler's (1990) idea of the heterosexual matrix. As hegemonic masculinity, Connell (1995) describes those forms of masculinity which are dominant and accepted in a certain cultural environment. Elements of hegemonic masculinity in cultures of the Minority World include an emphasis on men's superiority over women, rationality, physical strength and competitiveness. It is a deeply relational concept, complemented by the notion of *emphasised femininity*. The latter suggests compliance and empathy as dominant female attributes, and serves to reinforce ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Browne (2004: 69) adds that it is possible for different types of masculinities to be lived in the classroom, but 'it is the dominant form of masculinity that determines what it means to be a "real" man or boy'. While the concept of hegemonic masculinity is useful in terms of theoretical explanations of gender practices, Connell and other writers have also cautioned against using it in an overgeneralising way. Hegemonic masculinity may take on many different nuances, and emerges in particular 'historical and socio-spatial (in terms of social class, ethnoracial, sexual and age variations) modalities' (McGuffey and Rich, 1999: 608). Newman et al. (2006: 298) use the term 'borderlands' to describe the social position of boys who inhabit the 'space' between the extremes of expressing their gender identity in a very 'masculine' way on the one hand, and an 'effeminate' way on the other hand.

The idea of heteronormativity encompasses that 'children's normative identities as "girls" or "boys" are inextricably tied to dominant notions of heterosexuality' (Renold, 2005: 7). Gender is thus routinely defined through a 'heterosexual matrix', described by Butler as

a hegemonic discursive/ epistemological model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender [...] that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality. (Butler, 1990: 151)

From this perspective, children's gender constructions are seen as embedded in expressions of masculinity or femininity within a hierarchical and supposedly heterosexual frame. To be a 'real' boy or girl means to desire the opposite sex, and deviating from normative masculinities or femininities also throws the heterosexual hegemony into doubt (for example, boys who step outside dominant forms of masculinity expressions may be 'homosexualised') (Renold, 2005: 7-8).

## **2.3.2 Children's gender identities and relations**

After clarifying key concepts and theoretical perspectives in research on children's gender identities, this section discusses some of the key studies in this field and their empirical findings. Existing studies on children and gender are predominantly based on research in schools (Kehily, 2005), as reflected also in studies reviewed in this section.

### **2.3.2.1 'Doing' gender**

In line with the constructionist and poststructuralist theories described above, research has drawn attention to the 'doing' or 'performing' of children's gender identities. Thorne's (1993) ethnographic study with 5-8 and 10-11 year-old children in two US-American primary schools is often quoted as a seminal study about children's constructions of gender in the school context. Her work emphasises the importance of children's play as a context for 'doing' gender in 'dramatic' performances of trying out different gender-related identities (often under the guise of 'we're only playing', Thorne, 1993: 5). This entails a view of the playground not as a location of trivial entertainment, but of experiences of power relations and emotions, and this corresponds to claims of the childhood studies field to take children's lives seriously and as worthy to be studied in their own right (Prout and James, 1997).

Thorne's detailed analysis of daily interactions is particularly useful for understanding the ways in which children, as well as adults and authority structures in educational institutions, actively reproduce or challenge gender through individual

and collective practices. For example, she describes the children's practice of 'borderwork' to explain how gender is constructed in an antagonistic way in gender-mixed groups. Although joint play of girls and boys may sometimes reduce a sense of difference, groups may also interact in ways that strengthen their borders:

When gender boundaries are activated, the loose aggregation 'boys and girls' consolidates into 'the boys' and 'the girls' as separate and reified groups. In the process, categories of identity that on other occasions have minimal relevance for interaction become the basis of separate collectivities. Other social definitions get squeezed out by heightened awareness of gender as a dichotomy and of 'the girls' and 'the boys' as opposite and even antagonistic sides. (Thorne, 1993: 65)

Thorne also takes a reflexive stance throughout her book, admitting, for example, how memories of her own school days have impacted on her relationships with different children, and reflecting critically on her gendered position as a researcher. For instance, paying attention to the use of language in the process of writing fieldnotes may reveal what categories of difference are emphasised and assumed to be relevant, e.g. writing 'six girls and three boys were chasing by the tires' differs significantly from 'nine fourth-graders were chasing by the tyres'. She also makes a point of deliberately switching between the phrases 'girls and boys' and 'boys and girls' (Thorne, 1993: 8), a suggestion that I also follow in this thesis.

Particular attention to the place of language and discourse in constructions of gender is given in Davies' (2003) study with 3-6 year-old children in four Australian pre-school centres. Her analysis, located within a poststructuralist framework, explores the children's experiences of 'becoming gendered'. In a first stage of data collection, Davies read feminist stories to the children and recorded their responses, followed by a second stage of ethnographic fieldwork. She views stories as the 'primary means that adults use to make available to children the kind of rational ordering of the social world that they themselves believe in' (Davies, 2003: 29). Davies argues that, while adults make sense of the world through forming clear and consistent storylines, children's stories and responses to stories often contain contradictions, which reveal the multiple and conflicting discourses available to them, for example along the dominant binaries of 'goodies' and 'baddies', or 'male' and 'female'. She suggests



that children constantly engage in ‘category-maintenance work’ (31), and the teasing or bullying of children who deviate from dominant forms of gender expression is an essential part of this process.

The ‘doing’ of gender, as explored by Thorne and Davies, raises questions about how gender is done in relation to other social identities. Although both Thorne and Davies focus predominantly on gender, they acknowledge its intersections with other aspects of difference. According to Davies, children’s very learning of gender (and other social identities) involves adopting the Western view of identity as fixed and unitary. However, this is a difficult learning process since it does not capture children’s actual experiences of multiplicity, diversity and contradiction in social relations and social identities. While children are competent at moving between various discursive frameworks which construct gender differently, they know that in order to reach a mutual understanding with people it is important to adopt the same discursive structures. However, Davies stresses that in order to move beyond limiting and discriminating gender stereotypes, educators need to give children access to a discourse that frees them from exactly this burden of liberal humanist thought about reality as fixed, and identity as unified, rationally coherent and separate from the social world. She suggests that children can gain this freedom ‘through an acknowledgement of the ways in which each form of discursive practice constitutes them’ (Davies, 2003: 167). Thus, both Thorne and Davies’ work raises questions about the conceptualisation of social identities – as complex and fluid – more widely, which will be addressed in the final section of this Chapter (2.5).

#### **2.3.2.2 Gendered spaces**

Feminist geographers have long drawn attention to the relationships between space, place and constructions of gender (e.g. Rose, 1993; Valentine, 2004; Bondi and Davidson, 2005), and a growing body of work focuses on the importance of space, particularly playgrounds and schoolyards, for children’s constructions of gender (e.g. Epstein et al., 2001; Karsten, 2003; Blazek, 2011; Rönnlund, 2013).

An example is Epstein et al.’s (2001) ethnographic examination of children’s gendered play at break time in two primary schools in London. The authors explore

the practice of playing football during the lunch break. In the first school, football was played predominantly by the older and bigger boys, occupying the main part of the playground for this, and, as a result, the remaining boys and all the girls were literally pushed to the margins. While many children resented this marginalisation, some girls also enjoyed framing the football court and observing the boys they ‘fancied’, thus underlining the constructions of masculinity and femininity in this way. While in this school the children were left to their own devices in organising the use of the playground, the second school operated a strict system designed and controlled by educational staff. In particular, one female teacher was in charge of organising the football activities. The school had a small dedicated, and fenced off, football court, and on each day of the week a different year group was given access to it. On Fridays, only girls (but from all years) were allowed to play. Although boys still dominated the football court throughout the week, a number of girls regularly joined their game. On the other hand, the fact that boys only had limited access to playing football also meant that they were compelled to find other activities during break time. This detailed example shows that children make use of the means available to them to construct gender on the playground, and this often involves the construction of hegemonic masculinities (Epstein et al., 2001) and of gender binaries (Karsten, 2003). Therefore, it has been suggested that the spatial and social organisation of children’s spaces holds the potential of challenging such power relations and identities, and of making alternative possibilities available (Rönnlund, 2013).

### **2.3.2.3 Gender and sexuality**

Renold’s (2001a; 2001b; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006) prolific writing provides insights into the importance of children’s sexualities, and the inextricable links with gender identities and relationships. Her work draws on fieldwork conducted in two UK primary schools with children aged 11. The key contribution of the research is its illustration of how heterosexuality serves as a normalising and pervasive force, which regulates children’s relationships in school and constrains and empowers how they live their identities as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’. Within a framework of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, children define ‘age-appropriate’ discourses and police each others’

sexual identities in often contradictory ways (Renold, 2005: 168). For example, the children engaged in many conversations about ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ types of sexual displays, e.g. about girls’ lengths of skirts. Revealing ‘too much’ was associated with older and forbidden types of sexuality, but at the same time the girls seemed to enjoy playing with expressing such forbidden forms of sexuality (‘tarts’ or ‘slags’). The girls themselves were most strongly policing such expressions, and this produced a contradictory discourse of both pleasure and pain, of moral approval and disapproval (50-51). Thus, Renold’s research challenges the popular assumption that children are not sexual beings, and shows the deep-running impact of heteronormative discourses on children’s gender identities and relationships.

### **2.3.3 Gender and education**

Debates on gender and education are often centred around the broad field of how the educational system contributes to the reproduction of gender patterns and relations (Dillabough, 2001), including a focus on how social and policy frameworks shape gender relations in schools (Forbes et al., 2011).

Gendered differences in academic achievements are particularly dominant in debates around gender and education, and are often framed by discourses of the ‘feminisation of schooling’ and a concurring ‘crisis’ of masculinity (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill, 2006: 5; see also Riddell and Tett, 2006). In the UK, results from GCSE exams have showed boys to be performing worse than girls over the past decades, resulting in a plethora of research (e.g. Epstein, 1998; Connolly, 2004; Francis and Skelton, 2005; Fuller, 2009) and media coverage on ‘boys’ underachievement’, which has been likened to a ‘moral panic’ (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill, 2006). However, as many researchers have stressed, the reality is much more complex than often portrayed: not *all* girls are doing better than *all* boys, and social class and ethnicity play a crucial role in children’s educational experiences and opportunities. Connolly’s (2004) ethnographic research with 5-6 year-old boys in two primary schools in Northern Ireland (one in an affluent, the other in an economically deprived area) provides some insights into the boys’ differing experiences of schooling. He suggests that

most of the young boys from the poor area experienced a mismatch between their lives at home and at school, with little parental support and resources, and a focus on 'living day-to-day' (202). These classed experiences resulted in the boys' development of particular ideas about masculinity, coined by the need to be streetwise, strong and looking after themselves in order to 'survive' (202). Boys from the affluent area, on the other hand, had constructed a masculine identity which was in line with, and even promoted, academic success and achievement. Their expressions of masculinity were less based on physical strength and prowess, than on demonstrating technical expertise and specialist knowledge (e.g. about dinosaurs, volcanoes, technology). Thus, constructions of masculinity, according to Connolly, are the key to explaining those gender differences in achievement which still exist after accounting for social class and ethnicity. He argues that, therefore, in order to address the gender achievement gap, wider inequalities need to be tackled, along with the promotion of a more positive and constructive form of masculine identities in early years.

The latter point resonates with issues raised in a growing field of research which explores how teaching practices influence children's gender identities (MacNaughton, 1997a; 1997b; 2000; Macnaughton and Davis, 2001; Browne, 2004; Blaise, 2005). MacNaughton (2000: 65), for example, calls for teachers to adopt a 'gender lens', in their observations, curriculum design and interventions, which also involves close attention to the children's complex social identities in terms of 'race', ethnicity, social class etc..

### **2.3.4 Discussion and gaps**

Although the emerging field of childhood studies has put childhood on the agenda in multiple disciplines, Montgomery (2005) argues that research in this field still predominantly focuses on issues of age and generation, at the expense of aspects of gender.

As this section has showed, research on children's gender identities has seen a shift from biological, developmental and socialization theories, to relational perspectives of gender. However, the gender binary of male-female is still dominant in social discourses within and beyond academia (Blaise, 2005), and developmental perspectives on gender still dominate textbooks for practitioners who work with children (Morrow, 2006). This is particularly significant given that educational institutions have been described as 'key sites for the production and reproduction of gender', and because children in the Minority World spend increasing amounts of their time in institutional settings (Morrow, 2006: 101). Some of the studies reviewed in this section have drawn particular attention to the ways in which the school setting impacts on children's gender identities (Thorne, 1993; Epstein et al., 2001; Davies, 2003).

A growing amount of research on children's gender identities is framed by feminist poststructuralist theory (MacNaughton, 2000; Davies, 2003; Renold, 2005; Blaise, 2005), and this body of work has drawn attention to the importance of language and power, as well as to the complex interplay of places and practices which shape the context in which children perform their relational gender identities. Although these studies have challenged essentialist notions of gender identities, not much attention has actually been given to exploring the intersections with other aspects of social identities.

Thus, while compared to the field of research on children and social class, the field of research on children and gender identities is much more sensitive to how children actively perform gender within a discursive space, there is still a need to

- explore the *intersecting* nature of different dimensions of gender identity, and
- focus on children's gender identities and relations in the *first years of primary school*, since most studies identified in this section focus on either very young children (at nursery age) or children in middle childhood, and there is thus a gap in relation to this age group.

## 2.4 Research on children and ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity has been described as including a broad spectrum of dimensions, such as cultural values and beliefs, geographical origins, physical traits (such as skin colour), language, religion, ancestry, nationality, and more (Connolly, 2003). ‘Race’ is often included in conceptualisations of ethnicity (Patel, 2009). The Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2003), for example, defines ethnicity as a combination of people’s racial group, skin colour, country of birth, nationality, language, national/geographical origin, parents’ country of birth and religion. In this thesis, I favour the term ethnicity over ‘race’, due to the latter’s gravitation towards a link with visible, physical, biological or genetic differences (Fenton, 1999)<sup>10</sup>. However, when reviewing the relevant literature, I have also included research focusing on ‘race’ and retain the terminology used in the respective studies. I use inverted commas around the term ‘race’ to remind of its status as ‘a fictional (racist), socially constructed concept’ (Burman, 2013: 234).

This section discusses literature about children’s ethnic identities and the importance of ethnicity in children’s everyday lives, particularly in educational contexts. First, I give an overview of the development of this field of research and its different theoretical approaches. This is followed by summaries from key studies which have explored children’s ethnic identities. Finally, attention is given to the increasing amount of research which highlights that children’s ethnic identities are contextual and intersecting with other aspects of their lives and social identities. Studies in this section focus on children aged from 3-16, and include research from the UK, US and other European countries.

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<sup>10</sup> My negative associations with the term ‘race’ are also linked to my personal cultural and linguistic background, since, as Lutz et al. (2011: 11) observe, using this term ‘reactivates the colonial and fascist vocabulary of racist ideology’ in German-speaking and other European countries.

## **2.4.1 Framing research on children and ethnicity**

Early studies on children's ethnic identities in the 1920s and 1930s showed that young children (by the age of three) recognise racial differences and have already developed racial prejudices. Similar to early research on children's gender identities, these studies on 'race' and ethnicity also employed cognitive development stages to explain children's acquisition of ethnic knowledge (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 1996). This body of work was criticised for its inadequate experimental designs, crude and simplistic understandings of 'race', and for reifying racial concepts by taking racial categories for granted and thus reproducing them in research (Connolly, 2003).

While these early studies were framed by positivist, experimental and psychological epistemologies, the past two decades saw the growth of sociological, qualitative and particularly ethnographic approaches which aimed at studying children's own views and constructions of ethnicity in mainly educational settings (e.g. Troyna and Hatcher, 1992; Holmes, 1995; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 1996; 2001; Connolly, 1998). While this field of research has focused mainly on children's ethnic identities, research in the field of education has drawn attention to processes of discrimination and racism in this arena (Konstantoni, 2011). Critical race theory (introduced into education studies by Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995) has highlighted aspects of the educational system which serve to sustain ethnic inequalities: the school curriculum can be seen as a 'culturally specific artefact' which maintains a white master script at the expense of minority ethnic pupils' life stories. Instruction and assessment strategies often assume a deficit model of non-white students, and if generic teaching strategies do not work for everyone, minority ethnic students tend to be found to be lacking. Also the unequal divide of resources, both in relation to school funding and minority ethnic groups' socio-economic positions in society, serves to further their educational disadvantages (Ladson-Billings, 2004: 60). Thus, discriminatory dynamics in relation to ethnicity have been shown to be connected to both the structural, operational and functional level of schooling, as well as to a personal interactional level (Mirza, 1992).

## **2.4.2 Children's perceptions of ethnicity and racialized experiences**

In this section, I summarise some key studies which were instrumental in the above-mentioned shift towards qualitative research on children's own views on ethnicity.

### **2.4.2.1 Racialized encounters in multi-ethnic educational settings**

Troyna and Hatcher's (1992) study with 8-12 year-olds in three primary schools in the UK is one of the first examples of research which sought to examine children's *own* views and experiences of 'race' and racism in schools through in-depth ethnographic research. Each of the three 'mainly-white' schools had a minority of Black children, about two or three per class. The authors suggested that, on the surface, 'race' did not seem a significant feature in Black and white children's interactions and thus it was tempting for schools to embrace a 'contact hypothesis' (195) – a view that considers racism to be dispelled by the positive experiences of Black and white children being together in schools. However, the study highlighted that, in fact, 'race' and racism were very significant for the children's cultures in the mainly-white primary schools. The most common expression of racism was through racist name-calling, a daily experience for some of the Black children which they described as upsetting, hurtful and making them feel angry and powerless. Through interviews with white children, the authors distinguished between 'strategic' and 'non-strategic' racist name-calling. Non-strategic forms involved children using racist names in 'hot' situations of emotional outbursts, followed by regret. Strategic forms of name-calling, employed by some children, saw racist names as a legitimate strategy to offend Black children. However, the authors warn of simplified conclusions about children's racist ideologies:

Society makes available to children a powerfully charged vocabulary of racist terms, but their use, while trading on the negative meanings that they bear, does not necessarily imply a commitment to the racist ideologies from which they derive. (Troyna and Hatcher, 1992: 76)



While the authors stress that they do not condone any form of racist abuse, they argue that instead, each incident needs to be analysed in terms of the children's racist or anti-racist attitudes and beliefs about 'race', and their interactional repertoire.

Troyna and Hatcher's (1992) findings are echoed by a US American study with a younger sample: Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) used unstructured observations to investigate 3-6 year-old children's racialized experiences in a pre-school day-care centre. The research describes how for the children, most of whom had no other interactive experience with different ethnic groups outside the centre, 'race' and ethnicity were powerful markers of difference which were used to define the self and other. Over the course of the fieldwork, and as the children had spent more time at the centre, their racial-ethnic awareness seemed to increase. For some, this would take the form of comparing their skin colour to others. Others used 'race' in complex social processes, e.g. one child instrumentalised 'race' both to self-identify, to find a partner, and as an exclusionary tool. The authors suggest that young children quickly learn the racial 'rules' of society, including notions of white superiority, such as exemplified in the case of a child's claim that 'only white Americans are eligible to pull a wagon' (182).

These two seminal studies on children's constructions of 'race' and ethnicity in multi-ethnic settings both suggest that even young children – contrary to popular discourses – are not 'colour-blind', but do indeed possess a complex and situational knowledge of power differences in relation to 'race'. Thus, children's racialized interactions are located within wider social discourses on 'race' and ethnicity, and children mobilise their knowledges by deciding whether to make certain interactions and forms of discrimination 'race'-based or not.

#### **2.4.2.2 Ethnic identities between school, home and community**

Although the above studies were located in educational settings, they acknowledged that life outside school can hold different experiences for children in terms of interactions with different ethnic groups in their communities. Indeed, research has shown that these differing experiences entail complex overlaps and contradictions between children's lives at home and in school. Smith's (2005b) qualitative study

with over one-hundred 9-11 year-old children from three culturally diverse primary schools in England on their religious identities found that schools were almost the only places which allowed children from different religious and ethnic backgrounds to meet regularly. Within school, children made friends with children from different religious and ethnic groups, but outwith school their friendship choices were shaped by their families' religious affiliations and other circumstances. Many children saw the mix of different religions in their schools as positive, although some also viewed it as a potential cause of conflict. This was particularly the case if children felt 'outnumbered' by a dominant group, as illustrated for example in the case of a Sikh boy who complained about a majority of Muslim children in his class, which left him feeling isolated. Assemblies and lunch times were described by the children as spaces which often enforced religious differences and promoted sub-groups. The religious status of the school, however, was seen as irrelevant for most children in the research. Smith found that the children's religious identities involved elements of kinship, age, gender and ethnicity (see also Hemming (2012) for a review of the literature on children's religious identities).

Barron's (2007) ethnographic research with younger children (3-4 years-old) in the North-west of England allowed insights into the complex intersections between children's lives at home and in their nursery. After observing the children in their homes and at nursery, he concluded that ethnicity was marked most by children when the differences between home and nursery were 'biggest'. However, the children performed their ethnic identities in multiple and shifting ways as they moved in and out of different communities of practice between home and nursery, in relation to language, class, culture, religion and ethnic identities. Barron concluded that children's ethnic identities are complex social practices and performances rather than related to maturity or cognitive development. This complexity has increasingly been recognised in research on children's ethnic identities, as outlined in the following section.

### **2.4.3 Emerging intersectional perspectives: multiple aspects of children's ethnic identities**

The above-described move towards ethnographic, in-depth research on children's ethnic identities in everyday lives has allowed 'to de-essentialize ethnicity while, at the same time, acknowledge and recognize the still significant role it plays in the contemporary world' (Huber and Spyrou, 2012: 295). There has thus been an increasing tendency to recognise the intersectional dimensions of children's ethnic identities in an emerging body of research, as discussed in this section.

#### **2.4.3.1 Intersections in children's friendships and relationships**

A number of studies have explored the interplay of ethnicity and other dimensions of difference for children's friendships and relationships, as well as processes of peer exclusion. Connolly's (1994; 1998; 2003; Connolly et al., 2009) mainly ethnographic body of work focuses on children's social identity constructions with a focus on ethnicity and its intersections with gender and, in part, social class. In his ethnographic research (1994, 1998) with 5-6 year-olds in a British multi-ethnic, inner-city primary school and its surrounding community, he studied how racism played an important role in how the children developed their social identities at the intersections of ethnicity, gender and social class. The research is framed by Foucault's discourse theory combined with Bourdieu's concept of habitus<sup>11</sup>. Connolly (2003) defines racism as a contextual and dynamic phenomenon, as a discourse which is internalized by individuals and shapes their sense of identity as well as their actions and behaviours. This discourse can be understood through the concept of ethnic habitus:

... ethnic habitus serves to continually remind us of the need to understand young children's emerging ethnic attitudes and identities as a consequence of their active involvement in specific sets of social relationships as well as their engagement with the particular social environments (such as

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<sup>11</sup>For Bourdieu (1993: 86), 'habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history.'

the home and the local neighbourhood) that they are located in. [...] In this sense the ethnic habitus can be defined as representing the totality of social practices and cultural dispositions that are often taken-for-granted and that are generated by and become generative of the ethnic group to which the individual belongs. (Connolly et al., 2009: 220)

Connolly (1998) explores how the children's experiences in school are shaped by the teachers' perceptions of the neighbourhood, which drew on stereotypical discourses of 'race', crime, single parenthood and a decline in family values on the estate. As a consequence, the teachers particularly targeted Black children, and mainly boys, with disciplinary measures. Connolly (1998: 114) argued that this overdisciplining of Black boys led to them being constructed as 'being "bad" and quintessentially masculine'. This, in turn, provided a context in which Black boys were more likely to be physically or verbally attacked by other children, resulting in them being drawn into fights or being perceived as 'hard', and finally being disciplined again by teachers for being aggressive. Thus, Connolly concludes that teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil relations form a complex feedback cycle, with the actions of one impacting on and exacerbating the other. South Asian boys, on the other hand, were constructed as 'effeminate' in teacher discourses (as helpless, small, and eager to please), and thus denied access to social processes which would allow them to construct their masculine status. In relation to Black girls, teachers tended to underplay their academic achievements and focus on their social behaviours. While Black boys were often perceived as troublesome, Black girls were constructed as 'creative', 'silly' or 'chattering' (Connolly, 1998: 154). South Asian girls, on the other hand, were often constructed by teachers as 'quintessentially feminine' (175), although this did not translate into notions of attractiveness which were valued in their feminine peer-group relations. Instead, South Asian girls were often constructed by other children as the 'sexual other' in relation to discourses of boyfriends, intimacy, love and marriage.

Connolly's observations about the intersections of gender and ethnicity in how children were constructed by teachers resonate with Konstantoni's (2011) findings from her ethnography in two Scottish nurseries. Paying close attention to the children's peer relationships, she concluded that, although gender appeared to be the

dominant category for children's friendships, it was on occasion outweighed by ethnicity: children who were excluded from the 'Scottish girls and boys' (238) tended to group together based on their shared minority ethnic status. However, she also observed that ethnicity seemed to be a 'taboo' category, and both children and educators preferred to talk about age and gender as factors for peer exclusion dynamics.

In their two-year qualitative study with older children (7-8 and 10-11 years old) in an Irish primary school, Devine and Kelly (2006) observed that the children constructed ethnic differences in multiple ways, sometimes involving racist name-calling or exclusions and generally through discourses of 'othering'. The authors located these processes within a general children's culture of wanting to fit in and be the same as their peers, which for the children from the majority group in this particular Irish context meant being white, settled and Catholic. However, children from minority groups found strategies of coping with these dominant norms. Minority ethnic boys, for example, successfully integrated over constructions of masculinity through sports, such as playing football (however, this was only a possibility for those boys who complied with dominant types of masculinity). Similar gender work in girls' groups involved a heightened sense of heterosexualised femininity (e.g. talk about boys and fashion), which was difficult for some of the minority group girls. For some Muslim girls, for example, the identification with both highly feminised gender groups on the one hand, as well as religious/ ethnic groups on the other hand, meant negotiating conflicting social identities and experiencing criticism from their ethnic groups.

The importance of sports as a marker for ethnic and gendered identities was also highlighted by Scourfield et al.'s (2005; 2006) qualitative study with 8-11 year-old children in Wales. When talking about their ethnic identities, children identified place of birth, language and sport as key elements. Sport was seen as an arena in which national boundaries could be drawn overtly and frequently, both in relation to which teams to support and which sports were associated with different nationalities (e.g. children described rugby as a predominantly Welsh, and football as a more English type of sport). The negotiation of these identities was also strongly gendered,

e.g. being Italian was associated by boys with being ‘stylish, sexy and good at football’ (55). Scourfield et al.’s work draws attention to how children’s ethnic and intersecting identities are heavily influenced by context and space (see also Gale and Hopkins, 2009; Hopkins, 2010; Christou and Spyrou, 2012).

While the above studies have explored multiple aspects in children’s social identities, they do not explicitly adopt an ‘intersectional’ framework. An exception to this is Zembylas’ (2010) ethnographic study with 7-12 year-old children in three public Greek-Cypriot primary schools in Cyprus, which employed an intersectional lens in order to explore the children’s constructions and experiences of racism and nationalism. In the schools of the research, many of the majority group of Greek-Cypriot children held racist stereotypes against the minority group of Turkish-speaking children, focusing on their ‘double positions as “Turks” (the arch-enemy of the Greeks) and dark-coloured and unclean (associated with a lower culture, race and socioeconomic class)’ (Zembylas, 2010: 319). Zembylas shows how this racism, performed in day-to-day practices at school, intersects with debates about nationalism and in particular the ‘Cyprus Problem’ (resulting from the Turkish invasion and occupation of the North part of the island). This was illustrated in children’s links between racist attitudes in school and the socio-political situation on the island, e.g. as phrased by one boy: ‘They [Turkish-speaking children] came to take over our school and steal everything from us, like they do in the occupied areas’ (320). Thus, the research shows how racist and nationalist practices are enmeshed in children’s everyday lives in school, and that wider power relations are central to children’s experiences in these processes.

The studies in this section have paid attention to particular intersections, mainly between dynamics of ethnicity and gender (Connolly, 1994; 1998; Scourfield et al., 2005; 2006; Devine and Kelly, 2006; Konstantoni, 2011). With the exception of some of Connolly’s writing, little or no attention is paid to intersections with social class. While the useful contribution of these studies thus lies in emphasising the complexity of intersecting social identities, this body of work also leaves open questions about which aspects of social identities matter to both children and researchers.

#### **2.4.3.2 Moving beyond ethnicity: which differences matter?**

While exploring intersecting dimensions has showed the complexity of children's ethnic identities in the above studies, for some authors this process has also led to a deconstruction of the significance of ethnicity.

Moinian (2009), for example, interviewed 12-16 year-old Swedish-born children of Iranian immigrants and described their hybrid experiences of being Iranian, Swedish, and many other social identities. In relation to ethnic identity, the young people stressed a 'non-identity' expressed in phrases such as 'it's just me, a human being' (45), resisting simple polarisations or reductionisms of social identities. In keeping with Savage et al.'s (2001) argument about people claiming to be 'just themselves' in terms of social class described earlier, this very expression of a non-identity can be interpreted as showing the significance of social hierarchies and stereotypical images attached to certain ethnic identities, which the young people may have sought to resist. Similarly, drawing on her ethnographic research with 8-13 year-olds in different neighbourhoods in Spain, Sedano (2012: 386) suggests that ethnicity was 'irrelevant' for the children's social identities, but that the main criterion for 'distinguishing between social actors' were 'structural inequalities'. Teachers working in the neighbourhoods studied reported problems of children forming groups 'among themselves', and expressing racist attitudes. However, Sedano claims that what appeared to be dynamics of ethnic forms of belonging were actually expressions of a differing classed habitus among the children.

These studies give rise to questions similar to the ones discussed in relation to social class literature in section 2.2.2.2, namely whether aspects of social differences can be essentialized and prioritised (e.g. is social class more important than ethnicity for *all* children in a particular neighbourhood, as Sedano (2012) suggests?). These questions tie into debates on how social identities and their intersections can be conceptualised, which I discuss in the final section (2.5) of this Chapter.

## 2.4.4 Discussion and gaps

There has been a shift in how research on children's ethnic identities has been conceptualised, from initially positivist and developmental to, more recently, sociological and constructionist approaches. This process implies a shifting view from ethnicity as a biological, fixed and static category, to viewing ethnicity as socially constructed and situated. However, many recent studies on young children's ethnic identities have been criticized for still referring predominantly to physical markers (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001; Connolly, 2003; Connolly et al., 2009). This practice is not only an illustration of researchers' own attitudes and preconceptions in relation to ethnicity and 'race' (Troyna, 1998; Benwell, 2009), but also reflects the assumption that children are not capable of using abstract concepts (going beyond 'skin colour'), and that their views are naïve and egocentric (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 1996).

Indeed, as with other research topics, 'assumptions about what children know, or do not know', also fundamentally shape research on children's racialized identities and experiences (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001: 15). Although the studies reviewed in this section have acknowledged socio-cultural constructions of ethnicity and 'race' and dynamics of power to differing extents, often children are still positioned as relatively passive within these discourses. Indeed, many of the reviewed studies use a vocabulary of children as 'being aware' or 'perceiving' ethnic differences (Troyna and Hatcher, 1992; Devine and Kelly, 2006), or 'learning' racism (Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001). This implies that ethnic differences and inequalities 'exist' in society and children mainly pick up, rather than contribute, to their manifestations.

This view is also exhibited in Connolly's (1998) appropriation of the Bourdieusian concept of 'ethnic habitus'. Within this conceptual framework, significant attention is given to how adult practices shape the environments in which 'ethnicity comes to be *acquired* by young children' (Connolly et al., 2009: 220, my emphasis). While this view is helpful in drawing attention to the importance of context, it also entails a deterministic view of children within processes of ethnic identity 'acquisition', and implies a static view of ethnicity as 'something' that can be acquired. This resonates



with the limitations of Bourdieusian frameworks which I have already pointed out earlier in this Chapter in relation to research on children's social class identities (section 2.2.2.2).

This rather passive view of children differs from other studies reviewed in this section, which have regarded children as *constructing*, rather than perceiving, ethnicity (Scourfield et al., 2006; Barron, 2007; Moinian, 2009). In particular, Barron (2007), Moinian (2009) and Zembylas (2010) draw on the notion of 'othering' in order to show how social identities arise from processes of social comparison between groups of 'us' and 'them', and 'I' and 'other'. This allows a more complex view of how social identities are constructed or performed, and there is an emerging theme of viewing social identities as hybrid or intersecting. However, studies which explore these complex ways in which social identities are performed in relation to ethnicity are still rare.

In relation to the reviewed studies on children's ethnic identities it thus appears that there is a lack of research which

- views ethnicity as *performed* in situated contexts with multiple possible expressions,
- explores how children actively perform their ethnic identities within complex discourses and power relations, and
- pays attention to the *intersecting* dimensions of children's ethnic identities.

## **2.5 Theoretical discussion: towards a framework for understanding children's social identities**

After reviewing the relevant literature on children's social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the previous sections, I now summarise the overall gaps from this body of work, and discuss the theoretical concepts that are needed in order to address these gaps.

### **2.5.1 Summarising the research gaps**

Overall, the findings of the reviewed literature have demonstrated that social class, gender and ethnicity are indeed significant dimensions of children's social identities and experiences of inequalities, within education and beyond. However, the review has also showed that the studies differ starkly in their theoretical frameworks, and that this has significant implications for what kind of research findings are produced. It is also noticeable that many of the reviewed studies do not reflect on such theoretical conceptualisations, and underlying theoretical discourses thus often frame the research only implicitly.

There are two emerging theoretical themes within the body of research on children's social identities as a whole: (1) a shift from viewing social identities as perceived or acquired, to being performed or constructed, and (2) an increasing recognition of the complexity and intersecting nature of children's social identities. The literatures on social class, gender and ethnicity sit differently within the spectrum of these emerging themes, and the shift is not a linear process.

Research on children and social class ranges from a focus on social and cultural dimensions (e.g. Lareau, 2003b) to an emphasis on material inequalities (e.g. Ridge, 2002). Bourdieusian frameworks have been useful here for conceptualising social class as a combination of both economic, cultural and symbolic dimensions. However, as I have pointed out, such frameworks have also led to children being viewed as determined by adult transmissions of different forms of 'capitals', and

have conceptualised social class as an essential (rather than intersecting) dimension of identity which is mainly transmitted onto, rather than co-constructed, by children. Definitions and descriptions of classed practices in the literature were often invested with normative values, viewing particularly children from ‘lower’ social classes through a deficit lens.

Many of the reviewed studies on children and gender have adopted feminist poststructuralist frameworks and thus viewed gender identities as performed in relational and discursively shaped contexts. A particularly useful contribution of this field is the focus on power<sup>12</sup> and language as shaping the various discourses which frame children’s performing of gender identities. However, there is a relative lack of research which explores how gender identities are performed at the intersection with other aspects of social identities, as also noted by MacNaughton:

Undeniably, gender is culturally constructed and bound up within culture. Understanding how this affects children in diverse cultural contexts is sorely needed if respect for diversity is to have meaning. (MacNaughton, 2006: 27)

The field of research on children and ethnicity has been particularly sensitive to complex, intersecting aspects of social identities, especially in recent studies which have drawn upon the concept of ‘othering’ in order to explore the relational and intersecting nature of children’s ethnic identities. Research in this field often focuses on either children’s ethnic identities *or* children’s racist discrimination or experiences of ethnic inequalities, and there has been little reflection on how these two dimensions are related, i.e. how inequalities may become manifest in social identities. Much of the research in this field also conceptualises children as ‘learning’

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<sup>12</sup> In this thesis, I conceptualise ‘power’ in line with Foucauldian and poststructuralist ideas, consistent with many of the authors whose work I draw on in the literature review and discussions of methodology (e.g. Davis, 1998; MacNaughton, 2000; Smith, 2005; Davies, 2003; Gallagher, 2008). In line with these authors, I view power not as a commodity (i.e. something that people *possess*), but rather as *exercised* through relationships. Therefore, questions of power do not only concern my analysis of children’s identities, interactions and relationships, but also permeate the relations of research and the production of knowledge (since power and knowledge are seen as inextricably linked).

or ‘becoming aware’ of ethnic concepts and racist attitudes, rather than playing an active part in constructing their ethnic identities.

To conclude, the overarching implication, which emerges from this body of literature as a whole, is the need for more research which

- explores how children actively *perform* their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity within particular contexts,
  - is sensitive to the *intersecting* nature of social class, gender and ethnic identities, and
  - is *reflexive* about the implications of the conceptual and personal lenses of the researcher, including how social identities are invested with differing values.
- 
- In terms of the empirical focus of research in this field, the literature review has also highlighted a gap in relation to research on young children’s social identities of social class, gender and ethnicity at *early primary school age*, and a particular lack of studies in the *Scottish context* (with the exception of Backett-Milburn et al., 2003 and Konstantoni, 2010).

In the following sections I discuss how these gaps tie into wider theoretical debates on identities, and develop a theoretical framework which makes it possible to address them.

## **2.5.2 Conceptualising social identities**

In this section I link the studies reviewed in the first parts of this Chapter to wider conceptualisations of social identities. I describe the shift towards recognising identities as plural and situated and the link between social identities and questions of agency. I conclude the section with describing the advantages of viewing social identities as performed.

### **2.5.2.1 From social identity to social identities: multiple forms of belonging**

As the literature review has demonstrated, the notion of ‘identity’ has been conceptualized in different ways throughout history, depending on the theoretical approaches and disciplinary contexts within which researchers are situated. Research underpinned by positivist epistemologies, assuming the existence of universal truths, views identity as a stable, unitary and essential category which children ‘inevitably’ develop, acquire or learn (Blaise, 2005). This view has been critiqued by social constructionists, who regard identities as produced under specific circumstances in time and place (Oakley, 1972) and in relationships with others (Gergen, 1991; 1999). Jenkins (2008) argues that

identity can only be understood as a process of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’. One’s identity – one’s identities, indeed, for who we are is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter. (Jenkins, 2008: 17, original emphasis)

Dynamics of constructing similarities and differences, or ‘othering’, were a constant theme in the reviewed literature, whether explicitly (e.g. children performing polarised gendered identities along the male-female binary) or implicitly (e.g. children stressing a ‘normal’ or ‘in the middle’ class identity in relation to an assumed ‘abnormal’ or marginalised other). Indeed, as Jenkins (2008: 24) suggests, processes of identification always involve ‘classifying oneself and others’, for defining who we *are* requires defining who we *are not* – who, where and what we belong to, and who, where and what we differ from. Thus, social identities involve complex, shifting and potentially contradictory forms of belonging and being different. Yuval-Davis (2006a) stresses that such forms of belonging are not only cognitive decisions, but deeply emotional and value-related processes. Not all forms of belonging are equally important to everyone, depending on people’s particular emotional investments in different forms of belonging at different times and in different contexts. This resonates with West and Fenstermaker’s (1995: 30) conceptualisation of gender, ‘race’ and social class as ‘ongoing, methodical, and situated accomplishments’, depending on the particular context, and holding different meanings for different people.

### **2.5.2.2 Social identities and agency**

Conceptualising social identities as plural, shifting and situated invites questions about the extent to which individuals are able to contribute to the ever changing construction of their own social identities. I have critiqued some of the reviewed literature for conceptualising children as merely the passive products of their environments, e.g. their parents' or teachers' practices. A contrary view is generally advocated by researchers in the childhood studies field, who view children as competent social actors who take part in the construction of their own childhoods, and are 'agents, as well as products of, social processes' (Prout and James, 1997: viii). However, the notion of children's agency has recently been increasingly problematized within childhood studies. Tisdall (2012), for example, states that children's agency is often conceptualized in an individualist and rationalist way, and while it has been beneficial in raising the profile of children's views, it also risks ignoring limiting or challenging contextual influences. Other critical voices have pointed out that children's agency is fundamentally dependent on their relationships with adults (Lee, 1998; Eßer, 2014) and on complex interdependencies with their peers (Konstantoni, 2012).

Despite the fact that children's agency and competence as social actors has been one of the central tenets of the childhood studies field,

it needs to be said that much of the writing on children's agency draws on a particular rendition of the relation between agency and structure which largely ignores the huge wealth of writing more broadly within sociology on this topic.  
(Oswell, 2013: 38)

It has been argued that childhood researchers have been interested in children's agency mainly in order to counter traditional views of children as passive and dependent (Tisdall and Punch, 2012) as well as to make political claims (e.g. in relation to children's rights and participation), rather than being motivated by an interest to theorise it (Oswell, 2013). There also seems to be some conflation in the literature on whether children's agency refers to their competence as meaning-makers, as 'social agents' in a merely theoretical sense, or as actually having an active role in bringing about social and political change (King, 2007).

Prout and James (1997: 26) advocate that the theorisation of the relationship between structure and agency in children's lives should be 'an essential component in any new sociology of childhood'. However, discussions of children's agency in the field have been criticised for borrowing concepts from the wider sociological discipline in 'naïve' ways and for falsely understanding agency as an 'exercise of authentic choice or self-directed action' (Valentine, 2011: 348). They have also been questioned for assuming that children are coherent and autonomous beings who 'intentionally' exercise agency (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008: 509).

The work of Giddens (1979; 1981; 1991) has been described as particularly influential for conceptualising agency in the childhood studies field (Prout and James, 1997; Valentine, 2011; Oswell, 2013). Giddens proposes a 'duality of structure' in terms of a dialectical relationship between agency and structure, with particular implications for understanding social identities. For Giddens (1979: 64), the 'structuring properties' which shape people's social identities can be understood as 'rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems' and existing 'as an absent set of differences, temporally "present" only in their instantiations'. He (1979: 53) thus views agency and structure not as separable but as 'presupposing one another'. A similar dynamic and constitutive understanding of the relationships between social identities and structures is exhibited by Jenkins:

It is in the consistency over time and across organisations of (stereo)typifications of identifications and patterns of allocation [of resources] that 'structure' – an organised pattern of relationships between relatively stable collective identifications and the conditions of individual lives – can be discerned in the human world. (Jenkins, 2008: 198)

In line with Giddens and Jenkins, Oswell (2013: 35) states that the sociology of childhood should understand agency and structure as 'two sides of the same coin' rather than as mutually exclusive. This means that the idea of 'having' agency (as if it was a commodity) in the face of structural circumstances becomes problematic, but that agency in itself needs to be understood as situated and emergent from particular cultural and social contexts (Oswell, 2013), and as 'complex, multidimensional and ambivalent' (Valentine, 2011: 348).

### 2.5.2.3 Performing social identities

Poststructuralist thinkers have contributed to the debates on agency and structure by drawing attention to the *discursive* practices which continuously (re-)produce identities, and by challenging normative ‘truths’ about identities and how they come into existence (Renold, 2005). Discourse, drawing on Foucault’s (1978; 1977) work, here refers to ‘socially organised frameworks of knowledge and meaning’ (Renold, 2005: 3).

Often described as a key concept of poststructuralist theory, Butler’s (1990) notion of ‘performativity’ emphasises the instability and contradictions of a person’s gender identity. She describes gender identity as an effect (rather than cause) of practices, institutions and discourses, continually produced and reproduced in people’s performing of identities:

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results. (Butler, 1990: 25)

She thus argues that there is no stable gender identity that is expressed through people’s actions, but that these very acts *constitute* gender identities. However, she does not claim that the way people perform gender is a wilful act, but rather is shaped through discourse:

Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate ‘act’, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names. (Butler, 1993: 2)

For this research, I take inspiration from Butler’s ideas by viewing social identities as performed: children *perform* their social identities, and they do so within the parameters of various discourses on these very identities. In line with conceptualizing children’s agency as social rather than individualized (Oswell, 2013), I also view children’s identities as *social* and *relational* (rather than through a psychological lens or as individualized notions of the ‘self’).

The notion of *performing* is useful for emphasizing that social identities are conceptualised as produced under specific circumstances in particular moments. I do



*not* view the performing of social identities as a wilful, intentional or fully conscious ‘act’ or choice.

This conceptualization of social identities entails a view of social identities as fluid and non-essentialist. This, however, raises questions about how the intersecting nature of social identities in relation to gender, ethnicity, social class etc. can be conceptualized. Therefore, I now turn to discussing the concept of intersectionality which addresses and problematizes exactly these questions.

### **2.5.3 Intersectionality**

The term ‘intersectionality’ was coined by Crenshaw (1989; 1991), who argued that the experiences of women of colour were not adequately addressed by either feminist or anti-racist scholarship, since they occupied an invisible space neglected by dominant discourses of discrimination which focused on only one dimension of difference – either ‘race’ *or* gender. Although credited with introducing the term, Crenshaw’s ideas were predated by other feminists who had deconstructed the category of women (Hull et al., 1982; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Riley, 1988; Spelman, 1988), as well as being linked to more general feminist debates about the complex situatedness of all knowledge (Haraway, 1987). Others trace the origins of the concept back to Sojourner Truth’s ‘Ain’t I a Woman?’ speech which questioned the essentialist notion of ‘woman’ and its social consequences (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Emejulu, 2011). Thus, although not new as an idea, intersectionality has recently become a ‘buzzword’ (Davis, 2008) in social research and arenas beyond academia. It has been described through a number of images and metaphors, e.g. as a crossroad (Crenshaw, 1991; Minow, 1997), as prisms (Cho et al., 2013), as a dynamic process (Staunæs, 2003), or as axes of difference (Yuval-Davis, 2006b). Addressing one fundamental concern of feminist scholarship, namely ‘the acknowledgement of differences among women’ (Davis, 2008: 70), it has even been acclaimed as ‘the most important theoretical contribution [of] women’s studies’ (McCall, 2005: 1771).

Perhaps related to the increasing popularity of the concept, the literature review has showed a growing recognition of the need for conceptualising children's social identities in an intersectional way. However, studies which actually take an intersectional approach in research with children are yet quite rare. An emerging body of research has used an intersectional lens in research with adolescents and young adults, particularly in the field of human geographies (Hopkins and Noble, 2009; Mirza, 2009; Rodó-de-Zárate, 2013; McLean Hilker, 2014; Gutierrez and Hopkins, 2014), but there seems to be a lack of intersectional research with younger children.

Drawing on a review of intersectionality debates in the relevant literature, Davis emphasizes the following key elements of an intersectional lens:

‘Intersectionality’ refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power. (Davis, 2008: 68)

However, as I show in this section, there are multiple ways in which intersectionality can be understood and operationalised, and the concept can therefore not be defined in absolute terms. Debates in the field of intersectionality are characterized by three main (related) tensions and challenges in relation to how categories and their intersections are conceptualised, namely whether as essentialist or non-essentialist, as identities or inequalities, and in relation to dimensions of social justice.

### **2.5.3.1 Essentialism versus non-essentialism**

While many authors who subscribe to postmodern, poststructuralist or feminist theories agree on the non-essentialist nature of identities, this produces challenges in relation to political activism and social change (Hughes, 2002). These challenges are reflected in debates on ‘identity politics’ and the question of whether identities need to be viewed as (at least temporarily) fixed and persistent in order to resist the oppression of certain ‘groups’. These issues have been central to debates about intersectionality, and about how the intersecting nature of categories can be conceptualized.

Knudsen (2006), drawing on Yuval-Davis (1997) and Lykke (2005), distinguishes between additive and transversal/constitutive approaches to intersectionality. As *additive* approaches she describes those which view gender, ethnicity, social class, and so on as interacting, but separable, categories. Such approaches open up questions about the hierarchies of categories, i.e. which are the most important ones and have the highest significance for a person's life (as, for example, in the case of Lareau's (2003b) claim that social class was more significant in her participants' lives than 'race'). Knudsen (2006: 64) compares this approach to viewing categories as 'pearls on a string'. From an additive perspective, categories can be added up in some way. This has been criticised as 'dangerously essentialist' since it assumes social identities to be fixed and separable, and further presupposes a base identity (white, male, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual) onto which 'categories of oppression' are added (Valentine, 2007: 13).

Furthermore, viewing categories as separable also raises questions about which categories, and how many, to include in the first place. Most intersectional studies focus on the 'classic' triad of class, gender and 'race'/ethnicity (Knapp, 2005). Others include age, sexuality and disability, but this list could be continued infinitely, and there are now heated debates in feminist theory on which and how many categories to include (e.g. Lutz and Wenning, 2001; Davis, 2008). Butler (1990: 143) states that identity theorists inevitably close their lists of categories with an 'embarrassed "etc."'". She argues that this constitutes a 'sign of exhaustion' and signifies the inevitable failure to fully encompass a situated subject. Yuval-Davis (2006a, 2011), on the other hand, argues that there are some categories which shape the lives of most people, such as class, gender, age and ethnicity, whereas other categories, such as for example belonging to a particular caste or religious group, would be relevant for specific groups of people only. She argues that an intersectional analysis should focus on the *situated importance* of categories, i.e. which are salient for the respective people at the heart of research, and therefore claims that Butler's critique is not relevant since the exact dimension of the 'etc.' will be filled in according to the specific research circumstances. She concludes that

Butler's critique is only valid within an identity theory framework which views categories as additive.

Yuval-Davis (2006a; 2006b; 2011) advocates a *constitutive* approach to categorization. Constitutive, or transversal intersectionality approaches, view categories as pervading and transforming each other (Knudsen, 2006) and imply a critique of identity approaches for essentialising and prioritising certain categories (Wright, 2010). Burman (2003: 299) states that the multiplications or additions of categories entailed in additive approaches leave out 'both the further constraints and the opportunities produced by the intersection of structures'. Anthias (1998) supports that, for understanding the social outcomes for people at intersecting social positions, those positions need to be assumed to be constitutive of each other. While essentialist approaches assume categories as given, advocates of constitutive intersectionality approaches draw attention to the socially and discursively constructed nature of categories and consider issues of power (Anthias, 2013a).

Thus, it appears that the debate about essentialist vs. non-essentialist conceptualizations of categories is related to a second tension, namely whether intersectionality should be used to explore the complexity of social *identities* on an individual, experiential level, or of systemic *inequalities* on a structural level.

### **2.5.3.2 Social identities or inequalities? Multiple levels of analysis**

In the field of intersectionality theory, debates have emerged about the scope of intersectional analysis: should intersectionality be used for exploring how categories intersect within individual lives and identities, or as a means to understanding social structures (Davis, 2008)? This goes hand in hand with the question of 'whether *all* identities are intersectional or whether only multiple marginalized subjects have an intersectional identity' (Nash, 2008: 9, original emphasis)<sup>13</sup>. Prins (2006) claims that

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<sup>13</sup>These debates go beyond the academic discourse: In Scotland, for example, the Equality Network (2014) draws attention to how LGBT people may simultaneously experience homophobia, racism, sexism etc. and draws explicitly on intersectionality to explain such processes of multiple discrimination. In film and print resources the Equality Network refers to those groups of service users as 'intersectional people'.

there is a cultural dimension to these debates, maintaining that US scholars tend to focus more on systemic and structural approaches, whereas British scholars are more interested in aspects of social identity.

The question in itself can only be posed if the social identities of individuals and systemic inequalities are conceptualized as separable issues, a view that entails a particular ontological perspective on the relationship between structure and agency. Through this perspective, normative debates similar to the ones around identity politics are invoked, since the answer to the question requires prioritizing what focus of research is ‘more important’ – people’s subjective identities, or systemic inequalities.

If returning to Giddens’ (1979: 5) conceptualisation of structure as ‘both medium and outcome of reproduction of practices’, the separation of ‘individual’ social identities and ‘structural’ inequalities becomes problematic. In fact, postmodern and poststructuralist approaches have challenged this division, since they generally advocate a complex and dynamic understanding of the intersections of social class, gender, ethnicity etc. as ‘*simultaneously* subjective, structural and about social positioning and everyday practices’ (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 75, my emphasis).

Whether intersectionality is conceptualized as exploring identities or inequalities, or both, is related to the levels of analysis at the focus of research. Yuval-Davis (2006b: 195) claims that additive approaches, with an emphasis on identities, tend to solely focus on the experiential level of analysis. Constitutive intersectionality approaches, on the other hand, go beyond studying people’s lived experiences by including the ‘macro axes of social power but also involve actual, concrete people’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006b: 198). They do so by exploring the complexity of intersections on multiple levels of analysis (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; 1992; Yuval-Davis, 2006b):

- An intersubjective and experiential level, i.e. how people experience their daily lives in terms of advantage or disadvantage, in- and exclusion, and specific identities – including people’s attitudes to others and affective relationships.

- An organizational level (e.g. schools, state agencies, unions, NGOs, or the family), in terms of the ways people interact with, within or as agents of institutions and organisations.
- A representational level, expressed in texts, ideologies, legislation and symbols.

According to Anthias and Yuval-Davis, constitutive approaches need to consider intersections on these three levels of analysis, and thus consist of a combination of the individual, intersubjective as well as the systemic, structural aspects of intersections. Thus, constitutive intersections do not focus on *either* social identities *or* inequalities, but on both and the relationships between them.

This stance is useful for conceptualising social identities and inequalities for the scope of this research. The focus of this study is on children's social identities in situated contexts. However, this focus is not separable from children's experiences of inequalities, since the relationship between subjective identities and structural inequalities is seen as complex and mutually interrelated (Brah and Phoenix, 2004): performing social identities in certain ways may lead to the manifestation of particular inequalities, and at the same time structural inequalities may become manifest in the ways in which children perform their social identities. In this way, exploring how social identities are performed can reveal insights into how different forms of power are exercised, and inequalities produced (West and Fenstermaker, 1995).

#### **2.5.3.3 Different ontological bases: underlying conceptualisations of social justice**

Even if researchers agree on the benefits of a constitutive intersectionality approach, which takes account of multiple levels of analysis (the experiential, organisational and representational), there arises another question in relation to the conceptualisation of categories. Categories are not reducible to each other, e.g. although ethnic inequalities often involve social class inequalities, they cannot be explained in terms of social class alone. As Yuval-Davis (2006b: 200) points out, being 'Black or a woman is not another way of being working class', since these

categories have different ontological bases. One way of conceptualizing these ‘different kinds of difference’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006b: 199), is through Fraser’s (1997; 2008) framework of the different dimensions of social justice, namely justice of *redistribution, recognition and representation*.

The redistribution discourse of social justice emphasizes the need to distribute resources, including skills and knowledges, equally among everyone. The recognition discourse stresses that different groups’ contributions, values, languages and cultural backgrounds need to be made visible and be valued in the same way (Fraser, 1997). In her later work, Fraser (2008) introduced a third dimension of social justice – the representational dimension – which refers to the right of all members of a community to actively participate in decisions which affect their lives<sup>14</sup>.

Various categories of difference and inequality sit differently within this framework of social justice, as they fall into either or all of these dimensions to different degrees. This is also a point of contestation among different writers. Phillips (1997), for example, argues that the category of social class is based on exploitation, whereas other categories such as gender or ‘race’ are related to recognition claims. Fraser (1997) agrees that social class relates strongly to the redistribution model, but argues that gender and ‘race’ are ‘bivalent’ categories which span across both redistribution and recognition discourses. Harding (1997: 385) claims that there are also categories which represent ‘mere differences’ in relation to different perspectives and knowledges, but which do not carry power differentials. Also the literature reviewed in this Chapter sits differently within this framework. While some studies on social class have conceptualized it through a recognition lens (Streib, 2011; Roets et al., 2013), others have stressed the redistributive issues of material inequalities (Ridge, 2002; Sutton et al., 2007).

Yuval-Davis (2006b: 200) argues that categories are situated differently within these dimensions of social justice and this needs to be evaluated on a case by case basis

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<sup>14</sup> This dimension is particularly relevant to the growing popularity of discourses of children’s participation as entailed in the UNCRC (see for example Tisdall and Davis, 2004).

since ‘such generalizations are historically specific, are not inherently valid in every situation and are under continuous processes of contestation and change’. Thus, while the specific ways in which categories intersect is always dependent on the different dimensions of social (in)justice involved, this needs to be reflected on depending on each particular research context.



## 2.6 Conclusion: research aim and questions

In the first sections of this Chapter (2.1 – 2.4) I have reviewed the relevant literature about children's social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity. I have summarised the findings of this literature and discussed them in relation to the content and gaps, and in relation to the benefits and advantages of different theoretical frameworks employed in this body of work. I have identified two emerging theoretical shifts in the literature: a shift from viewing social identities as perceived or acquired, to being performed or constructed, and an increasing recognition of the complexity and intersecting nature of children's social identities. However, this shift is not a linear process and the fields of literature on social class, gender and ethnicity sit differently within the spectrum of these emerging themes.

Based on the literature review, I have argued that there is a gap in relation to research that

- explores how children *actively perform* their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity within particular contexts,
- is sensitive to the *intersecting* nature of social class, gender and ethnic identities,
- is *reflexive* about the implications of the conceptual and personal lenses of the researcher, including how social identities are invested with differing values, and
- addresses the gap in relation to research with young children at *early primary school age*, and the lack of studies in the *Scottish context*.

In the final section of this Chapter (2.5) I have presented a theoretical framework which makes it possible to address this gap of understanding children's social identities as performed within discursively shaped contexts. I have explored the theoretical debates around intersectionality, and the multiple ways of how intersections can be understood: as additive or constitutive, as individual or structural or both, and as rooted in different conceptualisations of social justice. These debates

have showed that the field of intersectionality theory is very diverse, and that the concept can be understood and operationalised in multiple ways.

Based on the gaps identified in the relevant literature, and the theoretical frameworks that I have drawn upon in this section, **it is the aim of this study to explore how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of a primary school.**

This aim is realised by addressing the following research questions:

**Research question 1:** How are the ways in which children perform their social class, gender and ethnic identities situated within and framed by the institutional setting (including relationships with staff), the policy and legislation context and wider social inequalities?

**Research question 2:** How do complex aspects of children's social identities intersect? What aspects of children's social identities are foregrounded or remain silent, and what tensions arise in this process?

In the following Chapter I now discuss the ontological, epistemological and methodological approaches that I have adopted in this study in order to investigate and answer these questions.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In this Chapter I discuss the methodological approach taken in this research. I begin by outlining the ontological and epistemological perspectives which frame this study and shape its particular focus. I then discuss how an intersectional research approach sits with a childhood studies lens and explain how I operationalize the concept of intersectionality in this research. Subsequently, I present and justify the research design, making the case for an ethnographic research in the context of a primary school, and discussing aspects of fieldwork and ethical issues.

In doing so, I do not only outline the rationale for particular methodological and ethical decisions, but also describe some of the processes and challenges involved in their implementation. Thus, this Chapter performs a shift in tense between *justifying* methodological decisions and *recounting* their impact, advantages and challenges. Through this I acknowledge the tensions between the ‘messy’ process of doing research in practice, and the clarity and straightforwardness generally expected in its representation (Rose, 1997; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). While I assume a reflexive stance throughout this Chapter, I draw particular attention to my roles and social identities, and ethical dilemmas and challenges, in a reflexive account of ‘being in the field’. Finally, I explain the processes of analysis and writing which led to the production of this thesis.

### 3.1 On knowing the social: ontological and epistemological considerations

In the previous Chapter I have identified and rationalised the overarching aim of this study, namely to explore how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of a primary school. I have situated this focus within a theoretical framework that views identities as social

(rather than individualised), relational, shifting, complex, intersecting and situated. In line with this theoretical framework, this thesis is framed by epistemological perspectives from social constructionist, feminist, postmodern and poststructuralist ways of knowing and their coinciding interest 'in the social construction of knowledges and discourses and the relations of power embedded within them' (McDowell, 1992: 400). Each of these terms represents complex debates and varying perspectives, as neither of these theories can be explained through a single definition or philosophy. Therefore, in this section I clarify which specific ideas from these epistemological perspectives have inspired this study.

The broad premise of constructionism is that there is no objective reality that exists independently from us, but that as human beings we interpret and make the world through our construction of meanings (Crotty, 1998). A *social* constructionist perspective stresses that human beings are constantly engaged in this process of meaning-making through social interactions, since 'in relationships the world comes to be what it is for us' (Gergen, 1999: 3). There is thus a focus on the interactionist and relational aspects of meanings, which underpins this research. This focus also requires recognising that such meanings cannot be determined outside of the contexts in which they are constructed, and that the same interaction can have different meanings for the people involved (West and Fenstermaker, 1995). There thus needs to be a focus on context, and reflexive attention needs to be given to the particular perspectives which produce particular knowledges. These are concerns at the heart of much of feminist writing.

Feminist thinkers have drawn attention to the 'everyday world as problematic' and have advocated a concern with people's relations, interactions and meanings within their everyday contexts (Smith, 1987). This involves questions about what *is* and *can* be known about the everyday, and a focus on the relationships between knowledge production and power, in particular through the concept of standpoint theory (Harding, 2004). Feminist theories have questioned objectivist, empiricist and positivist approaches to knowledge (Kolmar and Bartkowski, 2000), which were criticised for assuming a 'view from nowhere' (Harding, 1998) or for pretending to perform 'the God's eye trick' (Haraway, 1987). Standpoint theorists thus highlighted

that all knowledges are situated, since different people have different views on their own cultures and societies:

All knowledge is a condensed node in an agonistic power field. [...] Struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over *how* to see. (Haraway, 1987-83, 91, original emphasis)

However, also within the field of standpoint theory, there are debates on the legitimacy and value of different kinds of knowledges, and some have argued that certain standpoints are more valuable in providing ‘objective’ knowledge than others (the principle of ‘strong objectivity’) (Collins, 1986; Harding, 1991). Others have been critical of this claim, warning of the danger of researchers claiming to see ‘from below’ without actually doing so, or perceiving subjugated standpoints as ‘innocent’ (Haraway, 1987: 88). In this research I do not claim that particular standpoints provide more objective knowledge than others, but rather view standpoints as a pragmatic way of beginning and guiding the research process:

The standpoint of women [or, in the case of this study, children] does not universalise a particular experience. It is rather a method that, at the outset of enquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds. (Smith, 1987: 106-7)

While referring to the standpoints of women, this quote also resonates with the field of childhood studies. There exists a consensus in this field that children are a heterogeneous group (Prout and James, 1997; James and James, 2004) and that children’s experiences therefore cannot be generalised:

There is not one childhood, but many, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments. Different positions in society produce different experiences. (Frønes, 1993: 1)

Thus, it has been argued that considering children’s standpoints, and their particular social positions in terms of power, makes it possible to explore the social order from

a different perspective (Mayall, 2002). Therefore, in this research it is the standpoint of children which I aim to explore within the everyday context of a primary school.

However, I do not assume that children's standpoints represent a unified or essentialist perspective, but in keeping with postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives I assume an ontological position which rejects the existence of a single 'truth', accepts the complexity and multiplicity of 'realities' and knowledges, acknowledges subjectivity and contradiction, and deliberately attempts to disrupt assumptions about binaries and hierarchies (Atkinson, 2003). Moreover, a poststructural understanding of meanings as discursively constructed through relations of power and knowledge also raises questions about 'the role of research in reproducing these relations' (Tisdall, 2009: 214), which will be discussed in more depth through reflexive considerations throughout this Chapter, and particularly in section 3.4.

## 3.2 An intersectional research approach

In this section I discuss how an intersectional research approach fits with a childhood studies perspective, and how I operationalise the concept of intersectionality in this research.

### 3.2.1 Making the links: childhood studies and intersectionality

As I have suggested in Chapter 2, researchers in the childhood studies field (e.g. Morrow and Connolly, 2006; Hopkins, 2010; Evans and Holt, 2011; Huber and Spyrou, 2012; Gutierrez and Hopkins, 2014) have increasingly explored intersectional aspects of children's lives in recent years, particularly in the field of children's geographies and with adolescents and young adults. However, there exists little theorisation or analytical debate about the implications of bringing the fields of childhood studies and intersectionality together<sup>15</sup>. An exception is Burman's (2013) discussion on situating the category of 'child' in relation to intersectionality, and the particular ways in which debates in both fields are related and could usefully be advanced by bringing them together.

Burman (2013) points out that the sociological study of childhood (James et al., 1998) tends to 'bracket out' the category of childhood and its constructions in different socio-historical contexts. Intersectional approaches have considered how gender, ethnicity, 'race', social class, disability etc. shape children and young people's lives (e.g. Mirza, 1992; Burman, 2008b). Recognising differences and

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<sup>15</sup> Bringing together the fields of childhood studies and intersectionality, particularly in relation to understanding children's rights, inequalities and social identities, was the aim of a seminar series entitled 'Children's Rights, Social Justice and Social Identities in Scotland: Intersections in Research, Policy and Practice', funded by the Scottish Universities Insight Institute in 2013-14 (<http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Programmes201314/ChildrensRights.aspx>), of which I was a co-organiser.

intersections within children and young people's lives is certainly in line with one of the key tenets of the childhood studies paradigm, namely the emphasis on the heterogeneity of children as a social group (Prout and James, 1997; James and James, 2004). Thus, both childhood studies as well as intersectionality have contributed to the deconstruction of the category of childhood.

However, while much research in the childhood studies field has drawn attention to children's competence and agency on an individual, experiential level (focusing on 'microsocial relations'), Burman (2013: 236) claims that intersectional approaches could extend the scope of the field to include 'wider socio-structural issues, such as poverty, unemployment, political disaffection, and cuts in welfare provision'. This call is in line with Yuval-Davis' (2006b) suggestion that constitutive intersectionality approaches should include multiple levels of analysis in research, and thus combine both individual, intersubjective as well as structural aspects of intersections. So far, childhood studies have drawn attention particularly to the issue of generation, as an arena in which the experiential and structural relate. In particular, Mayall (1996; 2002) has recognised children's specific social position in terms of power due to the minority status of 'childhood', and Mannion (2007) stressed the importance of reframing children's participation in research and more widely through an intergenerational lens, taking into account the specific power relations produced in child-adult relationships. Indeed, drawing out the importance of the category of 'age' and the different ways in which it has been constructed (e.g. in relation to maturity, capability, development) is a central contribution of the childhood studies field. However, an intersectional approach to childhood would require more explicit attention to how the category of age is pervaded and constituted by other categories.

Finally, an intersectional lens in relation to childhood studies also requires increased reflection on *which* children's lives are being included when talking about 'childhood' (Burman, 2013), and which children participate or feature in research. Recently, childhood studies have increasingly problematized the field's failure to include Majority World childhoods in its research and theorisations (Tisdall and Punch, 2012), and it could be argued that an intersectional lens in childhood studies would draw particular attention to how children's lives differ across Minority and



Majority Worlds (Punch, 2003). There is also a tendency to exclude very young children from research (Warming, 2011). As the literature review has showed, research with *young* children on issues of social class, gender and ethnicity is limited, presumably in part due to researchers' underlying conceptualisations of young children as being too innocent, or incompetent, to be concerned by or knowledgeable about these topics. However, as Burman (2008b: 6) argues, 'views from the margins [...] are needed to generate the critical crossings of theory and practice' in relation to debates on childhood. Bringing the views of neglected groups into the academic discourse, in feminist tradition, has also been described as useful more generally in order to question the production of knowledges and to put issues of marginalisation and inequality on the agenda (van Blerk and Kesby, 2009).

Summing up, the field of childhood studies and intersectionality share a commitment to deconstructing the category of childhood. Bringing the two fields together opens up further possibilities of theoretical and practical advancements, in terms of combining and bridging experiential and structural levels of analysis, and by raising awareness of *whose issues*, and *which participants*, dominate research agendas.

### **3.2.2 Operationalising intersectionality**

While some scholars have argued that there should be clearer methodological guidelines attached to an intersectional approach (McCall, 2005), Davis (2008) suggests that it is exactly this lack of clarity which constitutes an advantage of the concept, as it opens up a space for critique and discussion. Indeed, the burgeoning of intersectional literature has seen an increasing creativity in how scholars have interpreted its scope (Cho et al., 2013). Different ways of conceptualising intersectionality – as additive/constitutive, as focused on individual identities and experiences or on systemic inequalities – have different implications for doing research and can comprise both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (McCall, 2005).

As the literature review has showed, social class, gender and ethnicity have been conceptualised in various ways and there are no universally agreed definitions. In addition, the recent recognition of these (and other) categories as intersecting has also highlighted that they stand in relationship to each other. In line with Yuval-Davis (2011) and others, in this research I view categories as *constitutive* of and not reducible to each other. This means that categories cannot be defined in absolute terms, or without making reference to the relationships between them and beyond.

Thus, it follows that any definitions of social class, gender and ethnicity are always incomplete, and therefore in this thesis I do not attempt to define them, but rather use them as a starting point for mapping social relations, as ‘salient aspects of discourse and practice’ (Anthias, 2014: no pagination). This means that I use the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity to guide my focus of observation, but attempt to remain open to their different forms of becoming visible in the research process. In line with Valentine (2007), I suggest that this kind of an intersectional research approach involves

looking at, for example, accounts of the multiple, shifting, and sometimes simultaneous ways that self and other are represented, the way that individuals identify and disidentify with other groups, how one category is used to differentiate another in specific contexts, and how particular identities become salient or foregrounded at particular moments. Such an analysis means asking questions about what identities are being ‘done’, and when and by whom, evaluating how particular identities are weighted or given importance by individuals at particular moments and in specific contexts. (Valentine, 2007: 15)

This approach corresponds to Anthias’ (2014: no pagination) description of intersectionality as a ‘heuristic device rather than a theory’ which works as a ‘sensitising concept’ rather than an actual framework with concrete methodological or theoretical prescriptions.

A constitutive understanding of categories also means that the inquiry cannot be limited to social class, gender and ethnicity, as they are inevitably intersecting with, and shaped by, other categories. Indeed, the category of sexuality has already been

shown to be significant in children's lives, particularly in intersection with performing gender (e.g. Renold, 2005), as well as the category of dis/ability (e.g. Davis and Watson, 2001; Davis et al., 2008). Issues of age and generation, as outlined above, have been central to the childhood studies field and have indeed been shown to be significant for children's social identities (Hockey and James, 2003), and power relations within societies (Mayall, 1996; 2002; Alanen and Mayall, 2001). Therefore, while I use the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity to guide the focus of this research, in line with Valentine (2007) I remain open to the particular forms in which they are being performed, and this means that other categories inevitably enter and leave the focus of research in this process. Thus, I operationalise Butler's (1990: 143) critiqued 'etc.' by allowing it to be filled with other categories which appear important in particular situations (Yuval-Davis, 2011). As Chapters 4, 5 and 6 show, the 'etc.' in this research is filled with aspects of sexuality, dis/ability (specifically in relation to children's educational attainment), religion, age and more ('etc.'). Age, in particular, holds an important position in aspects of children's social identities since especially in the school context, specific child-adult dynamics and power relations are brought to the fore (for example through constructions of children as learning and developing, and adults as competent) (Mayall, 1996; 2002; Alanen and Mayall, 2001). This study is framed through my personal lens as an adult researcher, and therefore age permeates most interactions and observations. Thus, while intergenerational relationships (between children and educational staff, and with me as the researcher) are present throughout this thesis, its main focus is on intragenerational relationships (between children), whilst also considering how these are embedded in wider social and structural relations. This focus is in line with the gaps in the literature (as identified in Chapter 2) of research which explores children's *active* performing of their social identities in peer relationships.

Summing up, I conceptualise the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity as constitutive of and irreducible to each other (Yuval-Davis, 2011) and use intersectionality as a 'heuristic device' (Anthias, 2014) which allows to be sensitive to the particular ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity are performed differently in different contexts and at different times. This implies a focus on

fluidity, situatedness and complexity in line with my ontological and epistemological perspective outlined above.

### **3.3 Research design: a school ethnography**

Based on the theoretical and epistemological frameworks and the identified gaps in knowledge, which have guided the research questions for this study, I have chosen to conduct this research through an ethnographic approach. In this section, I explain why ethnography is well-suited as a methodological approach for this study, and present the main features and debates in relation to ethnographic research with children and in schools. The following sections then provide more discussion on specific aspects and stages of an ethnographic approach, namely the research context, aspects of fieldwork, ethical issues and limitations of this particular research design.

#### **3.3.1 Why choose an ethnographic approach?**

A view of social class, gender and ethnic identities as ongoing, situated accomplishments (West and Fenstermaker, 1995), as outlined above, makes their performing an observable social process, involving a reflexive interplay of ‘social concepts, social practices and social contexts’ (Berard, 2006: 254). An ethnographic approach was adopted in this study in order to gain a contextualised and situated understanding of the ways in which children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in primary school.

The term ‘ethnography’ is composed of the ancient Greek words ‘ethnos’ and ‘grapho’ and means ‘writing about a particular folk or people’ (Silverman, 2011: 114). While there is no clear-cut definition of ethnography, in practice it

... usually involves the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, and/or asking questions through informal and formal interviews, collecting documents and artefacts – in fact, gathering whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the emerging focus of inquiry. (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 3)

Thus, ethnography generally involves multiple methods (most commonly, participant observation and interviews) and generates data from various sources (e.g. interactions, talk, behaviours, texts) (Mason, 2002). Ethnographers are interested in in-depth and exploratory studies of particular, generally small-scale, cases (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) and aim to explain interactions and behaviours within their particular contexts. This process was described as ‘thick description’ – a description of culture through the lens of the ethnographer who locates the description within a context of meaningful structures. Thus, ethnographers’ data can actually be seen as their ‘constructions of other people’s constructions’ (Geertz, 1973: 7).<sup>16</sup>

Ethnographers’ particular interest in people’s everyday lives and practices within their natural settings makes it possible to explore their understandings of their social worlds, their views, habits, beliefs and languages (Mukherji and Albon, 2010). This focus on social interactions within everyday contexts is particularly suited to investigate the children’s performing of their social identities which this research seeks to explore, and is in line with the attention given to the contextual doing and un-doing of social identities in an intersectional approach (Valentine, 2007).

### **3.3.1.1 Ethnographic research with children**

Writers in the field of childhood studies have claimed that ethnography as a method is particularly suited to study children’s lives (Qvortrup et al., 1994; Prout and James, 1997; James and James, 2004; Davis et al., 2008). It has been argued that ‘what ethnography permits is a view of children as competent interpreters of the social world’ (James, 2007: 246) since it allows a shift from children being the *objects* of study to becoming active *subjects* in the research process.

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<sup>16</sup> This resonates with Giddens’ (1987: 70) theory of double hermeneutics, according to which social science knowledge cannot be considered as insulated from the social world itself, since ‘the concepts and theories developed therein apply to a world constituted of the activities of conceptualising and theorising agents’.

Prout and James (1997: 8) suggest that ethnography gives children a 'direct voice and participation in the production of sociological data'. Children's participation in research (and beyond) has indeed been a key concern of childhood researchers in recent years (Christensen, 2004; Tisdall and Davis, 2004; Hill et al., 2004; Skelton, 2008; Powell and Smith, 2009; Kellett, 2010). Questions about how participation is understood and realised, however, are closely linked to conceptualisations of childhood. The growing field of children's rights in research and policy has led to an increased interest and recognition of children as active citizens with the rights, amongst others, to express their own perspectives, and to be involved in decisions and actions that affect them (UNCRC, 1989, Lansdown, 2004). There have been debates in the childhood studies field on whether research with children should be considered as different from research with adults (Punch, 2002b). Some have argued that ethnography implies a view of children as fundamentally different from adults, and thus makes it possible to study children's 'cultures' (James et al., 1998). Most researchers agree that children's competencies differ from those of adults (e.g. in relation to use of language, concentration span) and that this needs to be considered when using so-called child-friendly methods (James et al., 1998). In research with young children, it has been argued that a multitude of available methods (e.g. the 'mosaic approach' by Clark and Moss, 2001) may facilitate children's communication and participation in research. However, Punch (2002b: 330) warns of assuming an adult-child binary in a simplistic way, since most often such differences are 'a result of adults' perceptions and treatment of children in adult society and [...] of children's structural positioning' rather than children's inherent differences. The use of participatory methods has also been questioned due to their potential, if used naively, of obscuring adult agendas whilst claiming to 'empower' children (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008).

It has been suggested that ethnographic research may facilitate children's participation in terms of negotiating the relationship and engagement with the researcher (Davis, 1998; Konstantoni and Kustatscher, forthcoming). Children may be able to participate in terms of allowing them to direct the focus of the developing

research, and advise on the use of further research methods employed, depending on the researcher's sensitivity and flexibility (Christensen, 2004).

Therefore, childhood researchers have stressed the importance of being critical and reflexive about the role of the researcher and the particular power dynamics at play in the research process (Holt, 2004; Gallagher, 2008). Gallagher (2008) suggests that, while power may often be perceived as 'evil', as something that should be eliminated or 'handed' to participants ('empowerment'), it inevitably forms part of the research process and as such should be critically reflected on. This is in line with ethnography's deeply reflexive consideration of the role and impact of researchers in the research process. Ethnographic approaches emphasise the idea that as researchers we cannot detach ourselves from the worlds that we study. From this point of view, ethnography has been described as more than a qualitative research methodology, but as 'a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers' (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994: 249). This mode of being, in keeping with a reflexive research stance, requires researchers to question the nature of their relationships with participants and the accounts they produce from and about research (Davis, 1998).

### **3.3.1.2 An ethnography in primary school**

My decision to conduct this research within the particular context of a primary school was shaped by various theoretical, methodological and pragmatic reasons. Schools have increasingly been used as settings for the ethnographic study of childhood, not only in relation to the study of education processes per se, but also in order to explore children's social relations with peers and adults, the construction of their cultural knowledges, and processes of socialisation (James, 2007).

Schools as research sites produce and naturalise particular models of childhood (e.g. as developing, age-defined, and in specific power relations with adults), and therefore reflexive attention needs to be given to the impact that this setting has on both the processes and products of ethnographic research (James et al., 1998). School ethnographies have been particularly popular for investigating interactional dynamics of difference and diversity (Gordon et al., 2001) and have indeed been employed in



many of the key studies reviewed in Chapter 2 (e.g. Thorne, 1993; Connolly, 1998; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001; Lareau, 2003b; Renold, 2005).

Most children in the Minority World spend huge amounts of their time in educational institutions, and therefore these constitute significant contexts of their lives. Schools have been described as ‘key sites for the production and re-production’ of social differences and social identities (Morrow, 2006: 101). Studying the educational context within which children’s experiences are located, therefore, allows a ‘thick description’ of these processes of co-constructing differences. A more pragmatic reason for conducting this research in a primary school was that the particular segregation of children in such institutions makes it possible to involve specific groups of children in terms of age, gender, social and cultural backgrounds (as detailed in the following section) in line with the gaps identified in the existing literature.

For the reasons outlined in this section, I have decided to approach this study through an ethnographic approach in a primary school, involving participant observation, interviews with children and staff, and document analysis.

### **3.3.2 The research context**

The particular context for this research was chosen in accordance with the gaps identified in the existing literature. I was interested to find a setting of participants in early childhood (defined as up until eight years of age in line with Scottish policy frameworks (e.g. Scottish Government, 2008a)) in an educational context which was diverse in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender. Relying on data from the city’s school catchment areas (City Council, 2010), local deprivation rates (City Council, 2008) and free-school-meal statistics (Scottish Government, 2010)<sup>17</sup>, as well as on

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<sup>17</sup> These sources were used to identify schools which served catchment areas with high diversity in terms of social class. The schools’ diversity in terms of gender was ensured by approaching only gender-mixed schools, and diversity in terms of ethnicity was sought via communications with experts with a good knowledge of the areas and schools.

information obtained from experts in the field and local residents with a good knowledge of the community, I narrowed my focus to a number of schools which met these criteria. I then approached these schools informally and met with staff to sound out their interest in the project. Finally, I made my decision to conduct the research in Greenstone Primary (a pseudonym) since it was an excellent match based on a combination of meeting the gaps identified in the literature, the school's readiness to facilitate my access, and more pragmatic reasons of location and convenience.

In line with ethnographic principles, I view the context of this research not as some static container within which the children's experiences are located, but as fundamentally impacting on the process of research, and as co-constructing the children and adults' experiences within it in particular ways (James, 2007). Therefore, a deeper exploration and analysis of this context, and how it frames the particular discourses on diversity and difference which shape the children's performing of their social identities, is part of the context-setting Chapter 4. In brief, Greenstone Primary can be described as centrally located in a Scottish city and serving a catchment area comprising a broad social and cultural mix. It describes itself as a multicultural and diverse school and caters for about 250 pupils.

This research took place in a composite P1/2 class of approximately 25 children representing a high social diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity and social class, and due to being a composite class also representing some diversity in terms of age (compared to other school classes). About two thirds were girls and one third were boys (and this gender imbalance is reflected in the fact that girls feature more prominently in my fieldnotes and this thesis). About a fifth of the class were P2 pupils (aged 6-7 at the time of the research), and the rest were P1 pupils (aged 5-6 at the time of the research). Ethnicities in the class, as mentioned by the children and teachers, included Chinese, Pakistani, Malaysian, Arab, US American and different European ethnicities (French, German, Turkish, Polish and Spanish). Less than a third of the children were what could be described as white Scottish or white British. The children came from a range of distinctive backgrounds, which do not translate easily into specific ethnic labels. For example, some children had one white Scottish

parent and one minority ethnic parent; others' parents belonged to (same or different) minority ethnic groups. Some children were born in Scotland and others had moved here with their families, with different intentions to stay for short or undefined terms. This complexity illustrates the futility of attempting to label children's social identities, and supports a perspective of identities as performed, intersecting and situated.

School ethnographers with an interest in social identities often collect data from children's parents with regards to their occupations and income, and ethnic markers such as nationality, religion or language. In this study I decided *not* to collect such information for various reasons. First, the main focus of this research is on how *children* perform their social identities, which is, of course, very different from asking a parent/carer to provide information about their children and families. In fact, my conceptualisation of social identities as shifting and performed would be in contradiction to a static labelling through parental descriptors (e.g. describing a child as female, Pakistani and middle-class). Second, classifying children's social identities through their parents' descriptions would also imply that adult knowledge is somehow held superior to children's knowledges (Alderson and Goodey, 1996), a stance that I am trying to eschew in this research. Third, 'not knowing' about the children's home backgrounds also meant that as a researcher I was placed somewhat on a par with the children in terms of information held about each others' lives outwith school. This does not mean that as an adult researcher I could ever view the world in the same way as children do, or that I would be unbiased about any information disclosed about a child's family background. However, the very act of disclosing information – whether by children or staff, whether initiated by a child or on my inquiry – can be seen as a way of performing social identities, and thus becomes part of the data. For example, the fact that some children stressed their religion, others their nationality, and others again their parents' professions became an indicator of how they performed their social identities and what aspects were salient for different children at different times.

In this thesis, I do not provide a list of the children's pseudonyms and characteristics, as researchers in this field oftentimes do. On the one hand, this decision is based on

reasons of confidentiality. Due to the particular mix of age, gender and ethnicity in this composite class, it would be relatively easy for anyone with a knowledge of the school to identify individual children. On the other hand, presenting a list of names and characteristics would also be in contradiction with a theoretical approach which sees social identities as intersecting and shifting. However, there is a paradox in viewing social identities as shifting, and at the same time needing to hold on to some ideas about fixity as a researcher. My selection of the children's pseudonyms, for example, reflects my view of their gender, and, to some extent, their ethnic backgrounds. Also the very act of writing down fieldnotes presupposes the foregrounding of certain aspects of social identities in particular moments (e.g. writing about 'girls' or 'boys' foregrounds gender). Thus, the performed nature of the children's social identities is represented in this thesis via the construction, and de-construction, through my particular gaze as a researcher.

The school employed a number of educational staff. In this study, I have included those members of staff (through participant observation and interviews) who were regularly in direct contact with the child participants of this research (head and deputy head teacher, the class teacher and teaching assistants).

### **3.3.3 Fieldwork**

I conducted fieldwork in Greenstone Primary from November 2011 until June 2012<sup>18</sup>. As part of the data generation process I conducted participant observation and interviews with the children and staff, and identified relevant documents and texts.

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<sup>18</sup> At first, I had intended to begin and end my fieldwork earlier, which is reflected in some of the information leaflets and consent forms in the Appendix. Additional consent has been sought during the process of fieldwork to ensure that the City Council, gatekeepers, staff and children were happy for the research to be extended until June 2012.

### **3.3.3.1 Participant observation**

Participant observation was the main method of data generation in this research. It involved spending time with, observing, talking and playing with the P1/2 class at the centre of this study. I began my fieldwork with one day of participant observation per week, which I increased gradually until I came into school on an almost daily basis. Towards the end of the fieldwork, I decreased my presence in the classroom again. The end of my fieldwork coincided with the ‘natural’ end of the school year, and this was intended to facilitate a smooth ending process. Participant observation meant spending time with the children in the classroom as well as any other spaces of the school in which their daily routines took place: the gym hall/ lunch hall/ assembly hall (all incorporated in the same physical space), the playground, computer suite, corridors along the school building, and occasionally spaces beyond the school when the class went on trips (e.g. to various theatre plays or to visit a farm). In relation to Gold’s (1958) classic typology of the possible roles of an ethnographer<sup>19</sup>, I positioned myself as ‘participant-as-observer’, that is, as fully involved in the interactions in the setting, but at the same time explicit about my status as a researcher.

Data generated from participant observation mainly consisted of fieldnotes, taken in digital form on a tablet (an iPad). I had selected a tablet because it allowed me to type silently while in class, and to be quicker at typing notes than in handwriting. The children were allowed to see what I was writing (they often asked me to read it out) and sometimes added their own notes too. The notes taken in class were mainly jotted down in a quick and sketchy manner due to time constraints, and when I arrived home at the end of the day I spent a few hours writing them out in a detailed way. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I used a comprehensive note-taking strategy

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<sup>19</sup> Gold’s (1958) four roles in sociological field observation span a continuum from ‘complete participant’ to ‘complete observer’, with differing degrees of the researcher’s engagement with the setting in between (‘participant-as-observer’ and ‘observer-as-participant’). These roles can be seen as abstract constructions, since the role of the researcher cannot be defined in absolute terms, but involves situated and evolving relationships between researchers and participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

(Wolfinger, 2002), trying to record broadly what was happening during a certain time and leaving me with detailed descriptions of daily routines and practices. I then moved on to a 'salience strategy' by selecting what seemed to be 'the most noteworthy, the most interesting or the most telling', often resulting in a focus on deviant events (with respect to my expectations or previous observations in the field) (Wolfinger, 2002: 89). In order to reflect on my subjective processes of selecting observations, I formulated my notes in three columns according to Lofland's (1971) recommendation: (1) a running description of events (including verbatim notes of dialogues, compositions of groups etc.), (2) ideas and inferences (first analytical thoughts on how notes could be related to other observations, patterns or theories), and (3) my personal impressions and feelings (personal opinions, roles, emotions, and thoughts on how they related to the generated data). While there were overlaps between these columns, and their distinctions far from clear, I found this system useful for prompting me to reflect analytically on my notes. I also drew maps of the classroom and playground in the school where I indicated the children's locations and movements, and which served to aid my memory of particular situations in retrospect.

The notes were complemented by a reflexive diary that I kept during the course of my research for more general reflections, particularly about intellectual struggles and the intense emotional experiences involved in doing fieldwork. The content of my reflexive diary also resonates with Punch's (2012: 91) descriptions of feelings of academic guilt and a tendency to focus on negative aspects as a result of 'letting off steam'.

### **3.3.3.2 Interviews with children and staff**

Interviews are a key aspect of most ethnographic research projects, ranging from informal conversations during participant observation to scheduled interview appointments. Indeed, DeVault and McCoy (2006: 756) suggest that interviewing as part of ethnographic research should rather be simply called 'talking to people'.

Informal conversations with children and staff were an intrinsic part of my participant observation. After a few months in the field, I began to conduct more

formal and audio-recorded interviews with children and staff. For my interviews with children, I used a ‘child-friendly’ microphone which the children themselves could operate (including playing back their recordings). The interviews took the form of group interviews in the school library, and the children chose when and with whom they wanted to take part. The interview process was very unstructured: the participants could choose between drawing materials that I provided (both paper as well as the tablet that I used for my fieldnotes) or between reading a number of picture books that I had brought in, which explored issues around social and cultural differences<sup>20</sup>. For the drawing activities, I generally provided a few prompts (e.g. ‘would you like to draw a family, or a house’). If the children wanted to read the picture books, I asked a few questions (e.g. ‘which of the characters would you rather play with? What would you have done in this situation?’). These prompts were intended to spark conversations around issues of difference and social identities. However, the interview situations were often characterised by children being compliant to what they thought would be my expectations in answering my questions. Also the use of the microphone and their playful engagement with it generally seemed to distract from other conversation topics. In retrospect, I need to admit that my decision to interview children was mainly driven by my anxieties to produce some ‘hard evidence’ in the form of audio-files and transcripts, and my deep-seated positivist concerns about the inevitable partiality and incompleteness of my observations, rather than a well-founded epistemological and methodological rationale. The interviews thus provided some additional (and differently recorded) data on interactions in which the children performed their social identities. A few of these excerpts are included in this thesis, but they did not serve to answer any questions different from those addressed through data generated from participant observation.

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<sup>20</sup> For example, Anthony Browne’s (2002) ‘Voices in the park’, a non-linear picture book in which a visit to the park is described from four different perspectives: an upper-class lady, her son Charles, a working-class man and his daughter Smudge. All four characters are depicted as gorillas. Another example was Tony Bradman and Eileen Browne’s (1988) ‘Wait and see’, which tells the story of a mixed-race girl named Jo going shopping with her mum, and depicts her interactions with an ethnically diverse community.

The rationale behind interviews with educational staff (head teacher, deputy head, class teacher, teaching assistants – four formal interviews in total) was to gain a fuller picture of the school's characteristics and approaches towards difference and diversity, and to 'illuminate' my fieldwork observations from a different perspective (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 102). The interviewees were selected and approached as the research progressed and the questions were not standardized but varied slightly (Campbell and Gregor, 2002). The aim of the interviews was to explore the staff's conceptualisations of 'diversity' and social differences within the context of Greenstone Primary School, how staff saw their own roles within this institutional setting, and what challenges and practices, guidelines and policy frameworks they identified and used (see Appendix 8 for the staff interview guideline).

### **3.3.3.3 Texts**

A number of documents and texts were analysed as part of this research. Smith (2005a) suggests that texts are of key significance for organising and coordinating institutions (such as schools) across time and space, and therefore enter ethnographers' interest in investigating such settings. She recommends that ethnographers should not only be interested in texts and documents per-se, but in the 'text-reader-conversation', i.e. how texts are read, interpreted and activated by people in the setting. Thus, my aim was not only to explore how the identified texts constructed aspects of difference and diversity, but also how such constructions were taken up and interpreted within the school context (as analysed in detail in Chapter 4).

The texts explored in the context of this research included:

- Greenstone Primary's website and handbook,
- displays, bulletins, leaflets and lists around the spaces of the school,
- educational resources used in the classroom, e.g. books, exercises, educational games, YouTube videos and interactive websites,



- media and commercial images on clothes, lunch boxes, school bags, pencil cases, toys, etc., and
- policies and legislation (a list of which can be found in Appendix 1).

These documents are naturally occurring data, i.e. they would also exist without my presence as a researcher. They were, however, still identified, selected and interpreted by me as a researcher, and I was interested in how they were activated by the participants in the setting. While some of these texts were fully available to me and could be added to my data folder, e.g. policies, others have entered the research in a more indirect way through participant observation. For example, I wrote about displays on the children's lunch boxes in my fieldnotes, and these notes then underwent another layer of selection and analysis. Ethnographic research, therefore, always involves 'a double process of textual production and reproduction' (Atkinson, 1992: 5). A reflexive engagement with naturally occurring data is therefore essential, since 'no data are ever untouched by human hands' (Silverman, 2011: 274).

### **3.3.4 Ethics**

Ethical considerations have received much attention in research with children, and particularly in the field of ethnography, given its salience as a methodological strategy (e.g. Christensen and Prout, 2002; Bell, 2008; Gallagher, 2009b; Coady, 2010; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). In this section, I outline how I have approached some of the key areas of ethical concerns in this research.

#### **3.3.4.1 Access and informed consent**

Alderson and Morrow (2011: 101) define consent as 'the invisible activity of evaluating information and making a decision, and the visible act of signifying the decision'. Informed consent, according to Gallagher (2009b), includes four core principles: (1) participants need to explicitly express their willingness to take part in research, (2) consent is based on participants' understanding of what they are

consenting to (the *informed* aspect)<sup>21</sup>, (3) it is given voluntarily and without coercion, and (4) it must be ongoing, i.e. renegotiable throughout the research process.

There are tensions between researchers' intentions to prioritize children's competency and agency, and children's often 'subordinated positions' in institutional settings controlled by gatekeepers (Heath et al., 2007: 405). This means that, as in the case of this study, children's consent to taking part in research is generally sought last.

After informal conversations with staff at Greenstone Primary School and their expression of a potential interest in taking part in the study, I gained ethical approval from the relevant institutional review boards: the University of Edinburgh Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Review Committee, as well as the department of education services within the City Council of this research.

Following their ethical approval, I began formal negotiations with the gatekeepers who mediated access to the children in Greenstone Primary: the head teacher, deputy head teacher, class teacher, and the parents of the children in P1/2. The head teacher, deputy head and class teacher held complex positions since they were acting both as gatekeepers as well as participants in the study, and thus were provided with information leaflets and multiple consent forms (in relation to access, participant observation and taking part in an interview) (see Appendices 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9).

I sought parental consent through opt-out forms which the parents or carers were asked to return to the school only if they did *not* want their child to take part in the research (see Appendix 5). A small number of parents indeed 'opted their children out', but agreed for me to still interact with and involve them in all research activities, without however recording any data about them (dilemmas arising from this are discussed in section 3.4.2).

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<sup>21</sup> The informed aspect of consent means that participants need to understand 'why their participation is necessary, how it will be used, and how and to whom it will be reported' (British Educational Research Association, 2011: 5).

I then arranged with the class teacher to come into the school one afternoon to introduce myself and the research. Sitting in a circle on the floor with the children, I handed out copies of a colourful information booklet (see Appendix 6) to everyone and together we read through it. I introduced myself (as a research student from the University who wanted to learn about children's everyday lives), and explained the purposes of the research (to understand what matters to children, and what children think and feel about being similar or different). This was followed by a number of questions (e.g. 'what does a university look like?') which I answered, and then I asked the children to think about our conversation, and whether they would be interested to take part in this research, over the course of the following days. A few days later, I came into the classroom again and revisited the information booklet. This time I pointed towards a space on the last page where I invited them to place a sticker (I provided a few attached to every booklet) if they wanted to take part in the research. I explained the activities involved in taking part as speaking to me and me taking notes about what they were doing and saying. I stressed that regardless of their decisions at this point, they would be able to change their minds at any time later. Almost all children opted in at this stage<sup>22</sup>.

In order to allow for the children to express their *ongoing* consent, after a few weeks of fieldwork I introduced a system of movable photographs on the surface of a filing cabinet in the classroom. I marked one drawer of the filing cabinet as the 'opt-in' drawer (indicated by a green encircled picture of me) and another drawer as the 'opt-out' drawer (indicated by a red encircled and crossed-out picture of me). Inspired by Gallagher's (2009b) colour-coded stickers worn by children on their clothes in order to express (non-)consent, each child received a magnetic picture of themselves which they were encouraged to move between the two surfaces in order to express whether they wanted me to talk to them and take any notes about them, or not. While this

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<sup>22</sup> Over the course of the following days, I still interacted with those children who had opted out at this stage, but did not take any notes about them. Some children came up to me after a few days to tell me that they were now happy to opt in, presumably after getting an idea of what this would involve. Once the magnet model was introduced, I relied on the children's consent expressions through the position of their magnets and surrounding conversations in order to decide whether to take notes about them or not.

system was useful to some extent, it also raised a number of questions about consent, power and relationships, which are discussed in section 3.4.2.

#### **3.3.4.2 Anonymity and confidentiality**

The names of the city in which this research took place and of the primary school, staff and children have been anonymised. I have selected pseudonyms for the children, and educational staff are referred to as ‘staff members’ or with pseudonyms. The principle of confidentiality has been observed by keeping data stored in a secured place, and by sharing data extracts publicly only once all identifiable information about individuals has been removed.

The limits of confidentiality in research with children, in relation to concerns about child protection, safety and well-being, have been explored in the relevant literature (e.g. Gallagher, 2009b; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). In accordance with the City Council regulations, I provided a Scottish Disclosure certificate. I also familiarised myself with child protection procedures in advance of beginning the fieldwork<sup>23</sup>. When explaining my research to the children (and staff) and seeking consent, I said that if they would tell me something that made me think they or someone else were ‘being hurt’ I would ‘speak to someone who can help’ (see children’s information and consent leaflet, Appendix 6).

During this research, no child disclosed any experiences of harm or abuse, but there were a few instances in which I deemed it necessary to pass on information to the class teacher, e.g. when one girl repeatedly referred to her dad as ‘a horrible man’, or when I observed that one boy never ate his packed lunch and thus spent the whole day at school without a meal or snack, which seemed to go unnoticed by staff. The teacher illuminated such incidents by sharing information that she held about the

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<sup>23</sup> Every Scottish school needs to appoint a Child Protection Co-ordinator (often the headteacher), who is responsible for considering actions the school needs to take to support children at risk and for making referrals to social work services. This person would be the first point of contact for a researcher with concerns about a child’s safety or well-being (Scottish Executive 2003).

family, e.g. circumstances of divorce or separation, or decided to approach the children or their parents in order to follow up any concerns.

The writing of fieldnotes on a tablet in class raises some issues about confidentiality, since the children were able to see and add to what I was writing. Many of my notes were jotted down quickly, often involving abbreviations and bullet points. While this was mainly a pragmatic decision (being able to note down events and conversations quickly), it also served the purpose of ‘encrypting’ my data to some extent (similar to Bob Jeffrey or Lois Weis (interviewed by Walford, 2009) who admitted to using illegible hand-writing in order to conceal their fieldnotes from the children). However, the children were generally not interested in what I wrote about others, but only about them (which I would then read out or let them read), and were mainly interested in adding notes themselves rather than in reading mine.

#### **3.3.4.3 Dealing with sensitive issues**

In long-term ethnographic research, and after developing relationships with participants, it is likely that sensitive issues may be disclosed by children and it is important that researchers respond sensitively in such cases (Davis, 1998; Punch, 2002a; Cocks, 2006). As stated above, no child disclosed experiences of harm or abuse during the time of the research, yet sensitive topics were still sometimes talked about. (Of course, what counts as sensitive is very much a subjective perception, and I am relying here on my own meaning of the term.)

I generally avoided conversation topics which would prompt children to disclose intimate information about themselves or their families, however such disclosures still happened. Sensitive topics included, for example, issues around family relationships, e.g. separation or death (such as discussed in section 6.2.2). In such situations I attempted to respond with an ‘ethic of respect’ for the children involved (British Educational Research Association, 2011: 5), aiming to reduce any sense of intrusion, distress or discomfort for the participants.

The focus of this research, on social identities, can be considered as sensitive in itself, particularly in relation to potential experiences of discrimination. Relatively

little has been written in the relevant literature about how researchers (should) react in cases of children's racist, sexist or homophobic behaviour (Curtis et al., 2004), and Horton (2005: 364) admits to having responded with an 'awkward silence' to such situations. This resonates also with some of my experiences during the fieldwork. For example, when witnessing sexist incidents (such as discussed in section 5.2.2), I made an effort to challenge discrimination, but often found this difficult. Discriminatory remarks were sometimes made quickly and 'in passing', and ethically troubling events were part of everyday occurrences (Horton, 2005). The ad-hoc nature of such events meant that my reactions (or non-reactions) were often spontaneous and, in retrospect, I sometimes questioned my own responses. As an adult researcher, I felt particular responsibility to challenge discriminatory remarks (rather than 'condoning' them through non-action), but also found it difficult to find a respectful and non-stigmatising tone in countering such incidents.

#### **3.3.4.4 Feedback and dissemination**

The reasons for providing feedback to child participants range from ethical obligations (e.g. British Sociological Association, 2002) to concerns that children might feel left-out and might not want to participate in research again (Tisdall and Davis, 2004). However, due to the timescale of this research (e.g. an interruption of studies taken in the final year) I have at the stage of submission of this thesis not yet been able to provide formal feedback to the participants.

During the fieldwork, I had informal conversations with staff, and to some extent with children, about my observations and preliminary analytical inferences. However, during this intense time of data collection I often felt overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data produced and unsure about the conclusions that I would draw, which meant that I could only provide initial reflections – often more questions than answers – rather than any 'findings'. However, I suggest that my presence in the school and classroom had a particular impact on children and staff's behaviours and attitudes. For example, the class teacher confided that she enjoyed my presence in the classroom, since it permitted her to view her own actions through the lens of a

critical adult observer. This, in addition to numerous informal conversations throughout the fieldwork, allowed her to reflect on her own practice.

I have committed to making this thesis, as well as a short summary of it, available to staff involved in the research and to the City Council. I have agreed with the educational staff that after completion of the research I will arrange to return to the school to present my findings to the children. Since the participants of the P1/2 class of this research will most likely not all be in the same class anymore, this might take the form of a presentation to the whole school during assembly.

Findings from the research have been presented at various international academic conferences, and methodological reflections arising from this research have already fed into a few publications (Kustatscher, 2013; 2014a; 2014b; Konstantoni and Kustatscher, forthcoming).

### **3.3.5 Limitations**

As a qualitative study, the aim of this research is to produce contextualised, in-depth knowledge through an ethnographic approach within a particular setting (Mason, 2002). This means that the findings of this research cannot be applied to different contexts in a simplistic way, but nevertheless they are generalizable in the sense of providing insights and sensitising researchers to ways of understanding how children perform their social identities within particular contexts.

However, the nature of the research design, along with the theoretical frameworks employed, sets certain limitations to the scope and findings of this study. The particular research design and context meant that one school, and one class in particular, were at the heart of this research. This resulted in a specific group of participants in terms of the children's (and staff's) social class, gender, ethnicity, age and other characteristics. The particular mix in terms of age (in a composite P1/2 class) brought specific dynamics to the fore, and age was often foregrounded as a marker of difference (for example in relation to maturity or level of skills) by both

children and staff. As mentioned above, there was a gender imbalance in favour of girls in the class of the research. The catchment area of the school also resulted in a specific diversity in terms of the children's social class and ethnic backgrounds (discussed further in 4.1.1 and 4.1.2). All these characteristics are crucial in terms of impacting on the study, given the focus of this research on how children perform their social identities, and have limitations on the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalised.

This research presents a contextualised example of a Scottish primary school. The setting was chosen due to its particular heterogeneity and diversity in terms of the children's backgrounds. An alternative research design, for example comparing different, but more homogeneous school settings through a multi-sited ethnographic approach, would have produced different insights. As an ethnographic study, the focus was placed on the *doing* and *performing* of social identities in everyday life. Employing interviews or more participatory methods would not have permitted to follow this focus, but would have given different insights with regards to the children's *views* on social differences.



### 3.4 A reflexive account of ‘being in the field’

Hertz (1997) notes that ‘reflexivity’ should permeate the whole research process, from our choices of topic and participants, and the political, ideological and cultural dimensions of how we approach them, to the audiences that we aim to address. Therefore, it is not my intention to relegate ‘reflexivity’ to one devoted section, but I rather hope that my reflexive stance is visible throughout this Chapter, and the thesis in general. This is illustrated, for example, through my first person account used in this thesis, which serves as a reminder that I am writing from a particular and subjective perspective. However, while I have presented the ‘research design’ in a relatively straightforward and sanitized way in the previous section, I want to acknowledge now some of the emotional, contradictory and power-infused experiences and interactions during the process of conducting fieldwork, and their impact on the findings of this research.

Reflexivity has been described as a ‘critical gaze’ towards oneself (Finlay, 2003: 3) and a process of ‘self-analysis and political awareness’ (Callaway, 1992: 33), calling for the presentation of research findings not as ‘truths’, but as being situated and subjective. Hertz argues that

the outcome of reflexive social science is reflexive knowledge: statements that provide insight on the workings of the social world *and* insight on how that knowledge came into existence [...]. By bringing subject and object back into the same space [...] authors give their audiences the opportunity to evaluate them as ‘situated actors’ (i.e., active participants in the process of meaning creation). (Hertz, 1997: viii, original emphasis)

The co-construction of data between participants and researchers has also been addressed explicitly by feminist ethnographers:

The data is always produced collaboratively. It is always shaped by and to the situation of talk or observation and under particular discursive conventions. Should we treat this as contamination? I think that’s nonsense. (Smith, 2005a: 139)

Walby (2007: 1009) suggests that in addition to exploring the social relations of everyday life, ethnography also needs to investigate the ‘social relations of research’ between researchers, participants and audiences – namely the practices entailed in constructing our ontological positions, processes of data generation, analysis, and writing. Thus, rather than *preserving* the presence of our research participants in research, I view the process of doing research as *producing* and *co-constructing* our research subjects. This also resonates with critical discussions in childhood studies about researchers’ claims to preserve children’s ‘voices’ or ‘views’ in research (e.g. Holt, 2004).

However, from a poststructuralist perspective, the very distinction between object and subject, between reflexive/subjective and non-reflexive/objective knowledge, can be called into question, since the distinction itself is a construct which serves as a strategy for ‘asserting the authority of certain kinds of knowledge’ (Bondi, 2005: 235). While this critique is usually aimed at positivist claims of producing ‘objective’ and superior knowledge, it could also be applied the other way around: It has become *good practice* for many qualitative researchers to explicitly assume a ‘reflexive stance’ (not least because of claims that it may increase the research’s validity (e.g. Pillow, 2003)) which in turn legitimises our authority to make situated knowledge claims. I do not advocate an ‘endless’ (Patai, 1994: 70) questioning of my own position and its influence, but I would like to reserve some carefulness in proclaiming for myself a ‘reflexive stance’ which implies that reflexivity can be ‘applied’, as a sort of additional lens, or tickbox, to the process of doing research. Rather, I suggest that it means to acknowledge that my engagement with research experiences, both through memories and data, will continue beyond writing this thesis, and this representation is inevitably a partial construction.

### **3.4.1 My roles and social identities**

The significance of the researcher as ‘the key fieldwork tool’ (Van Maanen et al., 1989: 5) has been stressed in ethnographic literature, and the roles that researchers assume in the field have received particular attention in the field of childhood studies

(e.g. Mandell, 1988; Punch, 2001; Jordan, 2006; Gregory and Ruby, 2011). Davis and colleagues (Davis, 1998; Davis et al., 2008) suggest that these roles can be multiple, shifting and contrasting, and serve to illustrate the power dynamics at play in the research context. This strongly resonates with my own experiences of doing fieldwork, as illustrated in this section.

Reinharz (1997) argues that as researchers we bring a variety of selves into our fieldwork, which are then co-constructed and transformed in interaction with participants and the setting. In this section I reflect on the different social identities, particularly in relation to age, gender, ethnicity and social class, which I brought into this research, how I was perceived and positioned by the participants, and how this impacted on various roles that I was able to assume.

One of the most salient aspects of my social identity, in terms of being pointed out or questioned, was my age and related status. At the time of the fieldwork, I was in my late twenties, and if asked by children or staff I disclosed my age (although I appreciate that for a five-year-old, the difference between e.g. being 24 or 45 may not seem significant). However, my positioning as an ‘unusual adult’ who ‘is seriously interested in understanding how the social world looks from children’s perspectives’ (Christensen, 2004: 174) seemed to cause much confusion, since many of my behaviours were deviating from those of other adults in the setting.

I positioned myself as ‘not-knowing’ (Mukherji and Albon, 2010: 76) by stressing that I had come to Greenstone Primary to learn *from* the children. This was strongly related to positioning myself as a university student and non-expert, a role that I adopted in order to encourage the children to explain their actions to me, and probably, unconsciously, also in order to put educational staff at ease in my presence. However, this role as student and learner appeared to unsettle my status as an adult, as illustrated in the following excerpt from my second encounter with the children:

[After talking through the consent form, I ask if there are any questions.]

One girl says: Aren't you half a child too, because at university people are just older children, they're not proper adults yet.

I catch myself exchanging a smile with the teacher, and say: Yes that's right, some people at uni are still quite young, they are young adults.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 7 November 2011]

When the girl positions me as 'half a child', I do not actually contradict her, although I point out that university students are 'young adults'. The statement is steeped with prevalent binary assumptions about childhood as a time of becoming and learning, and 'proper' adulthood as a time of completeness and finished education, and I do not fit clearly in either of the boxes.

Although I did not aim to position myself in a 'least adult role' (Mandell, 1988), through my behaviours I often distanced myself from other adults. My attempts to join the 'children's culture' (Christensen, 2004: 165) were sometimes greeted with enthusiasm, and at other times perceived as dubious, as illustrated in the following excerpt from my first lunch break spent in school:

I am going down into the lunch hall (which is the gym hall!) with the children and sit with them as I have my packed lunch. This seems to be indeed a novelty! There are some teaching assistants around, watching the children, but none of them sits at the small tables with them or even eats. Soon I am surrounded by a group of girls from my class and we compare what we all have for lunch. The teacher walks around making sure that everyone has something to eat and then goes into the staffroom.

I have the feeling that my going into the lunch hall and sitting with the children has broken the ice quite a lot. Suddenly they seem less shy and more talkative. When I go to throw my packaging in the bin, one girl shouts: I'll keep you your seat!

[...] I notice that children from other classes look at me curiously. At some point a little girl from another class walks up to me, stands in front of me and stares at me for a few seconds.

Then she asks: Are you a child or an adult?

Her tone is very strict and I have the feeling that she feels she has to uncover something – obviously something is not right with me sitting at the small lunch table. She demands an answer to this. I say I am an adult, but a young adult. She looks critically and then walks away.

[After lunch, on the playground] an older girl comes along and a girl from my class introduces me: This is Marlies, she's my friend, she's a grown-up!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 10 November 2011]

The example shows how the way in which I am positioned is a co-constructed process, as my decision to sit at the children's tables is welcomed with mixed responses. Some of the children – mainly girls, in this case – from 'my' class seem to happily embrace my unusual role as part of their group. In fact, my unusual status also appears to endow me with a certain value, and for some children being associated with me seems to be perceived as positive. 'I'll keep you your seat' and 'Marlies is my friend' can be interpreted as ownership claims on me, the unusual adult (telling me where my place is), since in the early days of the fieldwork, it is unlikely that a trusted *friendship* (as described by Fine and Sandstrom, 1998) has already developed between us.

The fact that my role in the school has been introduced to the children of the P1/2, but not to children from other classes, raises ethical questions<sup>24</sup> and was also the cause for many curious interactions, such as the above in which a girl demands clarification as to my status ('are you a child or an adult'). My spontaneous response ('an adult, *but a young adult*') indicates some hesitation on my part to position myself unequivocally as an adult. In retrospect, this reaction fills me with some

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<sup>24</sup> Ethnographic research in schools or similar settings raises complex questions about how to deal with observations and interactions which have not been covered by a formalised, contractual consent procedure. However, there are also limitations to such contractual understandings of informed consent, which I discuss in section 3.4.2. It has been increasingly acknowledged that doing ethics in practice constitutes a messy process with unpredictable and sometimes unsolvable challenges (e.g. Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), and thus researchers are constantly required to evaluate and adjust their ethically appropriate behaviour in particular situations. In this case, I have decided that the benefits of raising these issues, and of the particular contribution that the girl's interaction makes to illuminating my role in the field, support my ethical decision to use this example.

embarrassment. Most likely, the girl was not confused by my appearance in terms of age (which I had somehow assumed since I was the youngest adult in the school), but by my ‘inappropriate behaviour’ – which had nothing to do with whether I was a ‘young’ or ‘old’ adult. Thinking about this exchange now, I assume that my response was an unconscious (yet unsuccessful) attempt to reject some of the power coming with the status of ‘adult’ (although on a rational level I was aware of this very criticism of the ‘least adult role’ (see for example Mayall, 2008)). I also wonder if my reaction was guided by some form of vanity, enjoying the experience in the same way as women are expected to consider it as a compliment if they are estimated younger than their actual age.

My ambivalent adult status was also reinforced by the fact that, often, the class teacher treated me like one of the children. For example, when bringing in chocolate treats to celebrate Easter, she made sure that I would get one too, or when handing out materials for craft projects, it was expected that I would produce my own along with the children. Crucially, however, I was able to decide how to negotiate my role, and when I wanted to assume a certain position:

I am sitting with Evie, Alba and Umar in the role play area.  
[...]

Claire comes and watches us. I say: Would you like to join us, Claire?

She says: Yes, but there is only four of us allowed here.

She counts me as the fourth person. I don’t want to be the reason for her to be excluded, but I also don’t want to leave the group. So I twist the rules a bit and say: You can have my place. I won’t play, I’ll just watch!

She sits down and starts to play.

I notice that the teacher has overheard this and is smiling.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 12 January 2012]

In this situation, I am positioned as ‘one of them’ by the children, but I use my adult power to bypass the rules and remain as a fifth person in the role play area. In this

case, the children are complicit in the rule-breaking, since it appears to be a win-win situation: we are all allowed to remain in the role play area. On other occasions, differing rules for myself constituted a clear privilege:

The whole class sits on the carpet doing a group session. I am coughing and Ms Brown encourages me to get up and drink some water. After I sit back down, Patrick and Mohamed get up and walk to the back of the classroom to drink some water from their plastic bottles too. They both smile at me and I smile back, not thinking much about it.

Ms Brown tells them that they should come back to the carpet and that they ‘know exactly’ that they are not supposed to be drinking during carpet time. I feel bad – I had been allowed, even encouraged by the teacher to drink inside the classroom, and the boys had been checking out if they could do it to. Had their smile towards me been a question? They sit back down without a comment.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 23 November 2011]

In this example, I am positioned as very differently from the children in terms of what was allowed and appropriate for me, but not for them. The teacher constructs me as an adult with particular privileges, and without much thought I take advantage of this.

Similar, more traditional adult roles involved being given the tasks of a teaching assistant, for example when I was asked to supervise groups of children or to provide support to children who had difficulties with certain exercises. Although I had talked with the teacher about my discomfort with such *authoritative* roles, and she was generally considerate of this, on occasion it still happened. At other times, my adult authority was constructed in more subtle ways, for example, when drawing on my status as an adult outsider lending weight to the teacher (e.g. ‘let’s impress Marlies by lining up silently’).

This was contrasted with moments in which children positioned me as a non-authoritative adult, for example when trusting secrets in me, or exchanging meaningful looks about a teacher’s behaviour, and thus making me a temporary children’s ally. However, in other situations children positioned me as a ‘responsible

adult' (Christensen, 2004: 174). For example, if a child got hurt while playing during break time, games were immediately interrupted, and I was approached as an adult who could help. Such moments gave me the feeling that our other interactions were 'just play', that both I and the children had indulged in a temporary illusion, and brought me back sharply to the 'real' world of adult authority and responsibility.

Already transpiring in the above excerpts is the significance of my gender in terms of my positioning and relationships with the children. On entering the field, I positioned myself as unambiguously female, and thus have come to experience the gender relations from this perspective. As will be explored in detail in Chapter 5, gender differences were often constructed in antagonistic and competitive ways ('girls versus boys'), and sometimes I was drawn into such dynamics and urged to 'take sides'. As in the above examples, I was often 'surrounded by the girls' or playing with 'the girls' (of course, this did not always involve *all* the girls from the class).

The fact that girls feature more prominently in this thesis is, in part, due to the fact that they outnumbered the boys in the class, but presumably also the result of it being easier for me to interact with them. In retrospect, I think that my eagerness, and anxiety, to build up 'good' relationships with the children, which in turn would allow me to generate 'good' data (Guillemin and Heggen, 2009), inhibited me from challenging or resisting gender stereotypes through the ways in which I performed my own gender identity, and this illustrates indeed the power of gender discourses. I have, sometimes self-consciously and at other times unaware, played with different expressions of femininity. Such expressions resulted in gendered interactions (and data) not only about constructions of femininity/masculinity, but also about their strong normative and emotional investments which I got to experience in person.

An example was the 'pirate party' which was organised as the culmination of finishing the 'pirate theme' that had run over a few weeks and for which the teacher invited everyone to dress up as a pirate. Using various pieces of old clothing, I put together a quite rough-looking pirate outfit. My final touch was a necklace made of bleached and painted chicken bones, the remnants from a dinner party. I had not anticipated the strong gendered reactions that my outfit would spark. Most of the



girls (many of whom had decided to perform the event as ‘princess pirates’ with highly feminized costumes) reacted with incomprehension as to why I would voluntarily wear such a dress, and expressed their disapproval and disgust particularly at the bone necklace. Many of the boys, on the other hand (maybe relating to the girls’ strong reaction?), were fascinated particularly by this object, and I felt that it increased my esteem with some of them, resulting in an unprecedentedly high number of invitations to play with ‘the boys’ on that day. However, I cannot deny that ‘the girls’ repulsed reaction left me feeling hurt and worried about my status within their group. I decided to come to school in a particularly ‘feminine’ outfit (e.g. wearing a skirt and my hair down) the following day, and felt relief at being welcomed back into ‘the girls’ group. Although I had enjoyed the recognition received from ‘the boys’ the previous day, this experience was useful in understanding the importance, and particularly the strong emotional experiences, of being positioned ‘correctly’ in relation to my gender identity.

In terms of my ethnic identity, I introduced myself as being an Italian, from a German-speaking area in Italy, who had already lived in Scotland for a few years. This role of a foreigner, who speaks a different language, and thus takes on the role of an ‘incompetent adult’, was described as particularly useful to recognise children’s expertise (Corsaro and Molinari, 2000: 180). However, I felt that my status as foreigner was overlooked by many of the children – especially those who were not Scottish either – since I did not have a strong accent and my appearance (including being white) could easily pass as Scottish. Despite being from a different country, I also shared many of the cultural practices in school, e.g. celebrating cultural events, such as Christmas, or being familiar with many aspects of children’s popular culture, and thus fitted quite smoothly into the dominant majority. Moreover, the fact that I was not familiar with the educational system and its practices was not picked up by many of the children, for whom – being in P1 – this was also a new and exciting experience. There were, however, times when children directly enquired about my background, and sometimes children who were not Scottish or British seemed to establish a sense of bonding over our being non-British, e.g. when telling me about their countries of origin, and in turn inquiring about mine.

I find it difficult to reflect on my positioning and performing of social class identity during the fieldwork. The concept of social class, and traditional definitions and associations (e.g. working class, middle class), have different – sometimes derogative – meanings outside Britain, where social stratification is talked about in different terms. At the beginning of this research, I was in fact hesitant to use the concept of social class, and have considered alternatives (e.g. socio-economic status, resources)<sup>25</sup>. However, after immersing myself into the literature, and living in Scotland for a few years, I saw the benefits and relevance of this concept as encompassing both the material, cultural and symbolic aspects of social stratification, although my hesitance still prevails when it comes to positioning myself. Apart from a cultural distance to British conceptualisations of social class, my feelings presumably also resonate with individualised contemporary discourses in which ‘class biographies, which are somehow ascribed, become transformed into reflexive biographies which depend on the decisions of the actor’ (Beck, 1992: 88), and with a general trend for people to refuse to ‘place themselves within classes’ (Bottero, 2004: 987). In relation to ‘traditional’ forms of social class, my positioning is ambivalent: while my educational status and professional trajectory can certainly be classified as middle-class, in my cultural and political values, which are rooted in my upbringing and family background, I often feel closer to what could be described as working-class. According to Savage et al.’s (2013: 240) recent ‘class calculator’, I am an ‘emergent service worker’: rich in cultural and social, but poor in economic capital, young and urban. However, their classification, relying on Bourdieu’s capital frameworks, has been criticised for a number of reasons, e.g. its reliance on age, neglect of ‘race’ and ethnicity, and a normative view of forms of cultural capital by contrasting ‘highbrow’ versus ‘popular’ forms of culture (Dorling, 2014; Bradley, 2014; Mills, 2014; Rollock, 2014). My difficulties to define my social class identity also reflect critiques of such a model as descriptive and static (Bradley, 2014), neglecting the relational and evolving aspects of social class identities which suggest

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<sup>25</sup> This different terminology, along with the evolving focus of this study, is also reflected in some of the information and consent forms used at the beginning of the research which predominantly refer to ‘socio-economic status’ rather than social class (see Appendices).

that during my fieldwork, I have operationalised my ambivalent social class identity in different, often unconscious ways.

My difficulties in positioning myself in relation to various aspects of my social identity illustrate the conflict between the act of *describing* my various social identities and the *performed* nature of social identities advocated in this thesis. There are limitations as to how much I can analyse the ways in which I perform my own social identities, since this analysis would presuppose that I am consciously performing all aspects of myself.

Through describing the various social identities that I brought into the field, and giving some insights into how my roles within the field have been co-constructed, in this section I have sought to explicate the particular perspectives from which I have conducted this study. The processes described in this section have also showed that, in my multiple roles as a researcher, I could not escape the discursive constructions of my various social identities. However, experiencing and contributing to these constructions, and their emotional investments, in person, has been an important tool for understanding their significance in this context.

### **3.4.2 Ethics in practice**

The inconsistencies and contradictions between abstract and institutionalised forms of ethics, and the messy processes of doing ethics in practice, have been acknowledged in the relevant literature (Mason, 2002; Malone, 2003; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004), particularly in relation to the unpredictable nature and direction of qualitative research (Gallagher et al., 2010; Alderson and Morrow, 2011). In this section, I reflect on some of these practical ethical dilemmas arising during fieldwork, particularly in relation to informed consent, power dynamics and research relationships. As described earlier in this Chapter, I asked the children to express their ongoing informed consent by moving magnetic pictures of themselves between a designated 'opt-in' and 'opt-out' surface in the classroom. However, as I have

explained elsewhere in more detail (Kustatscher, 2014b), this raised a number of questions about the meaningfulness of such a contractual consent model.

The use of the magnets was helpful in allowing some insights into how the children made their decisions to opt in or out. For example, some children distinguished between their roles as research participants and as pupils, and withdrew from their research participation when completing educational tasks (e.g. opting out while completing a maths exercise, and opting back in afterwards). Peer relationships were important in making consent decisions, and children debated amongst each other whether to opt in or out, and sometimes made their decisions collectively. Also dynamics of compliance became visible, as it seemed important for some children to fulfil what was perceived as my expectation for them to opt in. Only after stressing repeatedly that opting out would not be penalised, some children felt safe to do so. On the other hand, many children also seemed to enjoy being able to say ‘no’ to an adult through opting out, and thus to perform what was perceived as a subversive act in the school context, without any repercussions.

Power dynamics have been a key aspect in the literature on research with children, and there has been a shift towards a complex understanding of power which goes beyond binaries of powerful adults/researchers and powerless children/participants (Holt, 2004; Gallagher, 2008). Fine and Sandstrom (1998) claim that children are indeed powerful gatekeepers to their own worlds of games and relationships, and through the magnets I intended to visualise this form of power of the children, to make them aware of it and able to utilise it. While this was successful to some extent, the children also pointed me towards some fundamental problems of a model which seeks to ‘empower’ in this way. This was illustrated when one day I was told: ‘Marlies, I wanted to talk to you yesterday, but you were not here’. Over the following weeks, the children began to adapt the magnet model to my presence: when I was in school, they (mostly) opted in, and when I returned to school after a day of absence, I found all magnets on the opt-out drawer. This illustrated that ultimately, my understanding of opting in or out was very much centred on my own person.

Such appropriations of the magnets also brought to the fore the importance of relationships between the children and me as a researcher, as they illuminated the inextricable links between research relationships and participation in research. It became clear that some children wanted to interact and play with me, but not take part in the research (i.e. ‘me taking notes about them’). Moreover, the children whose parents had not given their consent to participation in the research, did – although not appearing as ‘characters’ with pseudonyms in my fieldnotes and in this thesis – inevitably form part of my observations and thus shaped my understanding and interpretation of events in the setting. This illustrates the contentious point that completely opting out is impossible in ethnographic research, but that there are, however, differing degrees of consenting and participation.

While the contractual magnet model, based on traditional understandings of informed consent as generally advocated by institutional review boards, implied an understanding of consent as either opting in *or* out, the children’s use of the magnets pointed towards a more complex understanding of consent. This became clear when the children started to use a third surface in the classroom (beyond the designated opt-in and opt-out spaces) to place their magnets, indicating that the two options provided were not sufficient. Instead, ongoing informed consent appeared to be not a decision of saying ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to participation in research, but became a process of establishing and managing a relationship with me as a researcher. This involved negotiating to what extent the children allowed me to become a part of their everyday lives, and, crucially, how they performed their diverse social identities within my presence and in relationship with me. Thus, in this thesis I advocate a view of ethics as inextricably linked to the processes of data construction, and indeed, to form part of ethnographic data. Acknowledging the co-constructed and relational nature of our fieldwork interactions and power dynamics, means to recognise that inherent problems of the contractual informed consent model cannot be resolved, and highlights the importance of creating a space for conversations around these issues to happen as part of the research process.

### 3.5 Analysis and writing process

Smith (2005a) describes researchers' engagement with data as a process of twofold dialogue: She refers to the *primary dialogue* as 'the actual collaborative process of an interview or participant observation' (137), that is, the social interactions with participants during fieldwork. During this phase, participants temporarily take part in a 'moment in a sequence that hooks back into the institutions of academic, professional, and related specialised discourses' (136). Herein lies an inherent power asymmetry of research, since 'the researcher knows what she or he is hooked into, and the informant does not' (137). In the *secondary dialogue*, the researcher engages with the texts produced in the primary dialogue (by reading, indexing, analysing etc.) and creates new meanings about it.

While social research often relegates processes of analysis to the secondary dialogue phase, in ethnographic research analysis constitutes an ongoing process beginning during fieldwork and extending into the process of writing (Davis et al., 2008; Punch, 2009). Thus, analysis is not a separate stage of the ethnographic research process, but permeates it throughout. This may be a reason for the fact that ethnographic literature, and literature on research with children more generally, tends not to provide clear guidance on analysis (Gallagher, 2009a). The entanglement of fieldwork and analysis means that ethnographers should be reflexive about how their own perspectives influence these processes, and need to 'make obvious the process through which they choose to represent people's lives in text' (Davis, 2000: 202-3). Thus, I am aware that my own impact, including my theoretical stance and engagement with the literature, could not be separated out from the process of analysis.

In this study, analysis was by no means a linear process. Instead, it involved multiple phases of organising my data, writing and re-writing, re-visiting the data and reformulating the research questions at various stages of the research. Analytical thinking for ethnographers begins in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), and indeed I made an effort in my fieldnotes, reflexive diary, and various essays I wrote

during the time of fieldwork, to begin my analytical engagement with the data. However, this process was also marked by emotional experiences of doubts about my capacities as a researcher, fear to jump to the ‘wrong’ conclusions, a sense of anxiety about the uncertainty of the research direction and a general feeling of being muddled and lost in the data. In retrospect, it may have been useful to spend more days away from the field, in order gain some analytical distance. In practice, however, my insecurity about the data led me to spend even more time in the field, in the hope of ‘making sense’ of my observations.

At the end of the fieldwork, I found myself approaching a complete data set of about 200,000 words of fieldnotes, in addition to interview transcripts, my research diary, and some 20 documents that I had identified as relevant to my research focus. Confronted with this overwhelming amount of data, and still tired from the intensity of fieldwork, I felt an initial resistance to delve back into it. In order to get a first overview, I began to use NVivo9 (a software programme designed to aid qualitative data analysis) to manage my data. I found the rather mechanical process of feeding data into the computer programme to be a welcome, relatively light and satisfying task.

I then began to read through the data and to add memos, annotations and links (functions of the NVivo9 programme), in order to keep notes of my thoughts and ideas. After this, I embarked on a process of coding, trying to add particular codes to significant data segments. At this point, I struggled with the temptation to add an infinite amount of codes, and with the difficulty to find codes that were broad enough to be applied to different data extracts, while at the same time doing justice to their situatedness and particularities. In order to ensure robustness of my findings, I looked for commonalities as well as contradictions or conflicting examples. On the one hand, I paid close attention to examples that appeared striking or deviant with respect to my expectations or other observations in the field (which in turn also highlighted what I considered to be ‘common’ practices). On the other hand, I was also looking for what appeared to be gaps, or silences, with regards to the salience of particular dimensions of social identities. At this stage, I started to feel that the possibilities of organising my data on a computer screen did not allow me to reflect

the spatial mapping of the data that took place in my mind, and I therefore switched to off-screen data management, involving the literal cutting, sorting and pasting of printed fieldnotes and transcripts.

This process allowed me to structure my themes under three main categories which roughly reflected the content for each of the following three chapters: (1) context, (2) social identities, and (3) intersections/emotions. Although the idea of my main contributions was only in vague shape at that stage, I began to draft, and write, the findings chapters. Thus, rather than engaging in a process of writing *up* (implying that the research process itself had been previously completed), I followed Richardson's (2000) principle of 'writing as a method of inquiry'. A similar stance is endorsed by Hammersley and Atkinson (2007: 190), who argue that 'ethnographic analysis is not just a cognitive activity but a form of writing'. In practice, this involved a process of writing various drafts of each chapter, following (and sometimes dropping) different lines of arguments, and experimenting with ways of bringing together the multiple, and sometimes contradicting, views and narratives of myself and the participants.

In the course of this, I realised that I held a lot of information about the setting and participants, which I had not recorded in my fieldnotes or other textualised data. Thus, the process of writing allowed me to capture this tacit knowledge that cropped up in the process of writing, and therefore writing also meant to continue the process of data generation (cf. Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005). In doing so, I deviated from Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007: 154) stance that 'memory is an inadequate basis for subsequent analysis', as indeed my memories were a crucial 'tool' in the analysis process. In particular, my emotions in remembering certain events (e.g. whether I had felt pity or anger in a situation) served as sources of knowledge for interpreting the data and enriching my knowledge (Hubbard et al., 2001; Bondi, 2005; 2014; Dickson-Swift et al., 2009).

The most demanding task was to decide on a coherent (though not linear) form of representing my findings throughout the findings chapters. Decisions to leave out certain data extracts, which went beyond the focus of the thesis, or reiterated points



already made, entailed the emotional experience of 'loss'. While many data extracts would have fitted in different sections, I needed to find an order which would make a convincing argument. This was achieved through a thematic representation of the findings.

In structuring the text, I generally followed Campbell and Gregor's (2002) suggestion of making analytical points, illustrated through data extracts, and followed by a discussion of how the data relates to and confirms the analytical point. Often, this involved providing multiple possible explanations for single data extracts. By providing multiple explanations for single events, I hope to offer readers a choice of different perspectives, values and voices in the final text (Davis, 2000). I also hope to 'enable others to see what [I] see' (Campbell and Gregor, 2002: 83). Through keeping my personal voice ('I') in the findings chapters, I also aim to draw attention to the constructed nature of the text, rather than it being an 'actual' representation of events (Richardson, 2000).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this Chapter I have located this study in relation to ontological and epistemological perspectives by situating it in relation to social constructionist, feminist, postmodern and poststructuralist ways of knowing. I have discussed how the concept of intersectionality sits with a childhood studies perspective, and how I operationalise it in this study. I have made an argument for conducting this research through an ethnographic approach in a primary school, and described the rationale behind choosing the particular school and class. I have provided a reflexive account of the experience of fieldwork, particularly in relation to the roles and social identities which I assumed as a researcher, and their impact on doing the research, and in relation to ethical issues arising in practice. Finally, I have presented the process of analysis as embedded in the process of writing.

In the following Chapter I set out the main features of the research context, including relevant policies and legislations and the particular discourses that frame children's social identities in the school context, before moving on to the substantive findings of this research in Chapters 5 and 6.

## **Chapter 4: Setting the scene: exploring the context of the ‘diverse primary school’**

In this Chapter I present and discuss the context within which the children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity at Greenstone Primary. I begin by describing the context within which this research took place in terms of its ethnic and socio-economic diversity (4.1). I then move on to discuss the policies and legislations which frame the children’s social identities in Greenstone Primary, and how they are taken up and ‘activated’ (Smith, 2005a) by staff (4.2). These ethnic, socio-economic, policy and legal contexts generate particular discourses with complex and sometimes ambivalent implications for how diversity and inequality are constructed in the school context. In the final section of this Chapter (4.3), I discuss the particular ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity are constructed in discourses and practices in Greenstone Primary.

This Chapter draws on documents, fieldnotes and staff interviews as data. It thus analyses discourses around diversity, and complex intersections of social categories, on multiple levels: (1) a representational level, as expressed in policies and legislation; (2) an organisational level, in terms of exploring the institutional discourses around diversity in Greenstone Primary and the ways in which staff act as agents of this institution; and (3) an experiential level, that is how social differences are constructed in everyday interactions, relationships and practices. This analysis on multiple levels corresponds to Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ (1983; 1992; Yuval-Davis, 2006b) call for a constitutive intersectional approach that considers both the individual, intersubjective as well as the systemic, structural aspects of intersections. Thus, this Chapter also explores how the wider structural context frames children’s social identities in Greenstone Primary, as described in Chapters 5 and 6.

## **4.1 Neighbourhood and social context**

In this section I present the characteristics of the catchment area and wider social context of the school in relation to ethnic and socio-economic diversity, which frame the particular context of Greenstone Primary.

### **4.1.1 Ethnic diversity**

Compared to the rest of the UK, Scotland has a relatively small minority ethnic population. At the time of fieldwork (2011-12), the minority ethnic population in Scotland amounted to about 3.7% of the total population (Scottish Government, 2013d). However, 10.5% of all school children were classified as not ‘white Scottish’ or ‘white-other British’ (National Statistics, 2012), which can be explained through the fact that most minority ethnic groups have a younger profile than the overall population (Scottish Government, 2013d).

Most minority ethnic groups in Scotland live in the major cities (Netto et al., 2011). Greenstone Primary is located quite centrally in one of these cities, whose continuous population increase over the past decades was partly due to its net in-migration. Of the international migrants moving to the city, the most popular origins were Spain, Poland, Republic of Ireland, India and China (2013a). Children in the local primary schools spoke over a hundred different languages (City Council, 2012b), of which Polish, Urdu and Arabic were the most commonly spoken (City Council EAL Services, 2012).

Similar to the overall population, the population of Scotland’s schools (including teachers) is ‘mainly white’. Most minority ethnic families therefore have the experience of living in ‘mainly white’ areas and sending their children to ‘mainly white’ schools. However, each education authority has their own distinctive minority ethnic profile and there are clusters with high minority ethnic populations (Arshad et al., 2004: 14). Greenstone Primary’s catchment area reflects one such ‘cluster’ of

minority ethnic population groups. As discussed in section 3.3.2, the school, and the class of this research, comprise a particular mix of children of white and non-white children from within and beyond the UK. This is recognised by the school, which in its School Handbook describes itself as a ‘multicultural school’ that celebrates the rich cultural mix in its community and the ‘learning experiences’ that this provides.

#### **4.1.2 Socio-economic context**

This research took place in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis which impacted on economies worldwide. Also the city of this research has been affected by the crisis in terms of higher unemployment, loss of public sector jobs, rising youth unemployment, lower household savings and falling property prices (City Council, 2013b).

Statistical data on deprivation gives an insight into the socio-economic composition of Greenstone Primary’s catchment area. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is the Scottish Government’s tool for identifying areas suffering from deprivation. It includes a number of domains (health, safety, education, employment, housing, access to services, income) which provide data about multiple forms of deprivation in small areas (called datazones). The SIMD then categorises these datazones into five quintiles along the spectrum of ‘most deprived’ (ranked 1) to ‘least deprived’ (ranked 5). At the time of this research, Greenstone Primary’s catchment area consisted of datazones representing all five types of quintiles: it consisted to a large proportion of the least deprived type of datazones, but also comprised datazones of most deprived and datazones on the spectrum between these (City Council, 2012a), illustrating the high socio-economic diversity within the catchment area.

The socio-economic composition of the catchment area is not necessarily accurately reflected in the school’s population. Especially parents on the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum are more likely to send their children to other, potentially private, schools, or decisions on attending different schools may have been made

based on other factors. However, insights from the fieldwork confirmed the impression of a relatively broad socio-economic mix in the class of this research. For example, parents' occupations as named by the children included check-out assistants, GPs, beauty salon employees, academics and unemployed.

## 4.2 Policy and legislation context

In this section I give an overview of the key policy and legislation documents that frame the ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity are constructed in Greenstone Primary. I begin with documents from the macro level (government policies and legislation), followed by the meso level (relevant local authority documents), and finally identify texts on the micro level (documents and practice guidelines at Greenstone Primary). I analyse these texts in terms of showing how they consider and construct dimensions of difference and diversity. I also discuss how they are ‘activated’, and thus come to generate particular discourses around diversity, at Greenstone Primary.

Smith (2005a: 101) suggests that texts serve as the ‘juncture’ between settings of everyday lives, such as a primary school, and the wider social and structural relations which coordinate and shape these settings. Through reading a text, readers activate its messages and insert it into the local setting. This ‘activation’ involves responding to the text and taking it up in some way (which may not be the one intended by the makers of the document). Such text-reader conversations are integral to the construction of institutional discourses which ‘provide the terms under which what people do becomes institutionally accountable’ (Smith, 2005a: 113).

However, Smith argues that introducing texts into ethnographic work can be problematic, since ‘somehow we don’t recognise them as located in the same temporal and local world in which we exist as bodies’ (2005a: 102). She claims that therefore people tend to overlook the presence of texts in everyday lives and the ways in which they coordinate experiences. Indeed, this resonates with some of my fieldwork observations: While some texts, such as displays, class lists or certain legislations, figured very prominently in live at school, other texts with high relevance, such as particular policy documents, were hardly visible nor mentioned explicitly, although they still shaped practices at school as illustrated in this section.

## 4.2.1 Global and UK context

### 4.2.1.1 European Convention on Human Rights and UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (came into force in 1950), more commonly known as the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), regulates the civil and political rights and freedoms that European States agree to ensure for people living within their jurisdiction. It is monitored by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. The Human Rights Act (1998), an Act of Parliament of the United Kingdom, largely gives effect to the ECHR in the UK by making it generally unlawful for public bodies to act in a way which is incompatible with the ECHR. Although the ECHR makes little explicit mention of children, it *does* apply to children (Child Rights International Network, 2013).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people a comprehensive set of rights. It was ratified by the UK government in 1991 but has not yet been fully incorporated into domestic law. This means that, although the UNCRC gives children in the UK a comprehensive set of economic, cultural, social and political rights, they cannot directly rely on them in court, and complaints cannot be brought to court solely on the basis of a potential breach of the UNCRC. A number of UNCRC Articles are relevant to the focus of this research: The UNCRC applies to all children and young people irrespective of their 'race', colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (Article 2). It gives children the right to be heard in all matters affecting them (Article 12) and the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14). Children have a right to primary education (Article 28) which should be directed at developing their personality and talents to the full, including



development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own (Article 29 (1c)).

Children should be prepared for a life 'in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin' (Article 29 (1d)). Moreover, children have a right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their families and communities also if these do not correspond to the majority culture (Article 30).

The UNCRC was often and explicitly referred to in Greenstone Primary, especially since during the time of my fieldwork the school successfully applied for a UNICEF Rights Respecting Schools Award (RRSA). RRSA's are a UK-wide UNICEF initiative and

recognise achievement in putting the UNCRC at the heart of a school's planning, policies, practice and ethos. A rights-respecting school not only teaches about children's rights but also models rights and respect in all its relationships: between teachers / adults and pupils, between adults and between pupils. (UNICEF United Kingdom, 2013: no pagination)

In the P1/2 of this research, the RSSA was worked towards by explaining and debating selected UNCRC articles (e.g. 12, 24, 28, 31). The teacher worked with the children to integrate these articles with the Class Charter (which contained statements such as 'We share with friends', 'We listen to and follow instructions', 'We always try our best', 'We use our thinking skills') and to create a collage which was displayed on the classroom wall. The children were encouraged to discuss and write down the practical implications of the articles not only for them but also for staff. The display was referred to throughout the year when opportunities arose in the classroom. Colourful UNCRC-themed posters and paintings, created by other classes of the school, were also displayed around the school corridors and were often referred to during the weekly assembly.

#### **4.2.1.2 Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 forms the basis of the United Kingdom's anti-discrimination law and replaced a number of existing anti-discrimination legislations, i.e. the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA) 2001, the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006. It came into force in October 2010 and was intended to simplify existing legislation and to tackle disadvantage and discrimination more effectively (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013a). It prohibits discrimination based on the 'protected characteristics' of

age;  
disability;  
gender reassignment;  
marriage and civil partnership;  
pregnancy and maternity;  
race;<sup>26</sup>  
religion or belief;  
sex;  
sexual orientation. (Equality Act 2010, c.15:i)

However, the Equality Act 2010 explicitly excludes most children and young people (from 0 – 18 years) from legal protection from unfair discrimination on the grounds of age. This has been controversial and criticised by child rights organisations (e.g. Children in Scotland, 2013; Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013b).

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<sup>26</sup> 'Race includes (a) colour; (b) nationality; (c) ethnic or national origins' (Equality Act 2010, Section 1.9)

It is also noticeable that social class is missing from this list of protected characteristics. In fact, Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 requires all public bodies to have ‘due regard’ to reducing socio-economic inequalities when exercising their functions. That could, for example, legally require local authorities to take measures to address poorer health and education outcomes in deprived areas. However, in November 2010 the coalition government of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats decided not to enforce this section of the Equality Act 2010.<sup>27</sup>

Bringing together different equality legislations has implications for intersectional discrimination. The Equality Act 2010 is pioneering in recognising and prohibiting so-called ‘dual discrimination’, (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of two relevant protected characteristics). However, it limits forms of multiple discrimination to a maximum of two categories (‘dual characteristics’)<sup>28</sup> out of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. This means that other characteristics, e.g. social class, marital status, caste, weight, language etc., remain excluded from legislation on multiple forms of discrimination, and that protection from intersectional forms of discrimination remains limited due to the constriction on two characteristics. It also indicates a model of additive, rather than transversal or constitutive intersectionality (cf. Knudsen, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Thus, while aiming to increase the efficiency of anti-discrimination law, the Equality Act 2010 has been described as being underpinned by a single-dimension logic of categories (i.e. viewing categories as strictly separated), therefore neglecting the ‘synergies’ of an intersectional approach and thus resurrecting the separation of categories under a new guise, reducing the flexibility and effectiveness of anti-discrimination law (Solanke, 2011: 1).

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<sup>27</sup> A focus on children’s socio-economic inequalities and particularly poverty was placed with the Child Poverty Act 2010, which legally binds the UK government to a commitment to eradicate child poverty in Britain by 2020. The Act requires England, Scotland and Northern Ireland to put regular strategies in place that describe the activities undertaken to tackle child poverty.

<sup>28</sup> This limitation to two grounds was described as a compromise between Equality ministers and the business lobby, with Equality Ministers suggesting that allowing for more than ‘dual’ discrimination recognition would be ‘unduly burdensome’ to businesses (Hepple, 2010: 16).

The Equality Act 2010 contains the public sector equality duty, often referred to as general duty, requiring public authorities to advance equality of opportunity and to eliminate unlawful discrimination. As such it regulates responsibilities for, amongst others, government departments, service providers and education providers. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has published guidance documents for schools (e.g. the Technical Guidance for Schools in Scotland, 2013). Schools are prohibited from discriminating against pupils in terms of admission, provision of education, exclusions etc. on the basis of the protected characteristics. Schools *may* (but are not required to) take ‘positive action’, i.e. ‘take proportionate steps to help particular groups of pupils to overcome disadvantages that are linked to a protected characteristic’ in order to ‘meet different needs or to increase participation of people with a particular protected characteristic’. Examples include measures taken to increase e.g. participation of girls in certain subjects or the achievements of gypsy traveller pupils (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013c: 5).

During my fieldwork, both in observations and staff interviews, the Equality Act 2010 was rarely referred to explicitly, but its terminology of ‘equal opportunities’ permeated staff talk about diversity and its principles pervaded daily practices at school. For example, in terms of taking ‘positive action’, a number of steps were followed in Greenstone Primary, e.g. English as Additional Language (EAL) support for some of the bilingual children.

#### **4.2.2 The Scottish context**

That no-one should be denied opportunities based on their ‘race’ or ethnicity, their disability, their gender or sexual orientation and their age or religion also underpins the work of the Scottish Government (Scottish Government, 2013b). The Scottish Government’s vision for Scotland’s children and young people wants them ‘to be confident individuals, effective contributors, successful learners and responsible citizens’. In order to achieve this, ‘children and young people need to be nurtured, safe, active, healthy, engaged in learning, achieving, included, respected and

responsible’ (Scottish Executive, 2005: 9). These principles are anchored in a number of Scottish policies and legislations, as described in the following sections.

#### **4.2.2.1 Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)**

Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is a national approach aimed at helping practitioners to improve outcomes for children and young people (Scottish Government, 2013e). The underlying principles include promoting the wellbeing of individual children and young people, placing the child at the centre and taking a whole child approach. Practitioners are also required to ensure that:

children and young people should feel valued in all circumstances and practitioners should *create opportunities to celebrate diversity*. (Scottish Government, 2013e: my emphasis)

The GIRFEC approach believes that children should be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible and included (the so-called SHANARRI indicators). Inclusion refers to

getting help and guidance to overcome social, educational, physical and economic inequalities; [being] accepted as full members of the communities in which they live and learn. (Scottish Government, 2012)

#### **4.2.2.2 The Early Years Framework**

The Early Years Framework was launched in December 2008 and aims to give all Scottish children ‘the best start in life’. It refers to all children from pre-birth until the age of 8 and is therefore relevant to the composite P1/2 class of this research. The aim of the Framework is to break cycles of inequalities in relation to health, education and employment opportunities through early and effective intervention (in combination with two other social policy frameworks from the Scottish Government: Equally Well, focused on health inequalities, and Achieving Our Potential, focused on tackling poverty). It sets out an ambitious aim for tackling inequalities, namely to have ‘the same outcomes for all and for all to have the same opportunities’ (Scottish Government, 2008b: 2). In line with GIRFEC, a focus is placed on the collaboration and alignment of delivery of services (Scottish Government, 2008a).

The Early Years Framework requires services to ‘pay attention to whether they are reaching minority communities and those with higher needs and then meeting those needs’. Specifically, it refers to ‘language, ethnicity and disability, as well as social circumstances’ as factors that need to be taken into consideration for meeting children’s individual needs (Scottish Government, 2008b: 20). It also states that, in order to meet diverse needs, parents and carers need to be provided with information in a variety of formats and languages.

#### **4.2.2.3 Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014**

This research fell into the development phase of a new Children and Young People (Scotland) Bill which was announced by the Scottish Government in September 2011, and was made into an Act in March 2014. The Act furthers the Scottish Government’s ambitious goal to make Scotland the ‘best place to grow up in’ (Scottish Government, 2013c: 2). The aims of the Act are to legislate for the Getting It Right for Every Child approach, to strengthen the role of early years support and childcare and to ensure better planning for looked after children (Scottish Government, 2013a). A major component of the Act also focuses on the Scottish Ministers’ and wider public sector’s duties to keep consideration of children and young people’s rights as outlined in the UNCRC (Scottish Government, 2013a). However, a number of voluntary sector and other organisations have raised concerns in consultations about the extent to which provisions of the Act will be realised since it does not legislate for full incorporation of the UNCRC into Scots law (e.g. Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2012; Scottish Human Rights Commission, 2012; Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, 2012; Together (Scottish Alliance for Children’s Rights), 2012). Flagship provisions of the Act include an increase of free childcare hours, and introducing free school meals to all children in P1-3 by January 2015.

#### **4.2.2.4 The Curriculum for Excellence**

The Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the Scottish national school curriculum for learners from 3-18 years and was introduced in August 2010. It aims to enable children to achieve ‘four capacities’, i.e. to be confident individuals, responsible

citizens, effective contributors and successful learners (Education Scotland, 2013b). In order to develop the four capacities, children should learn, amongst other things, to ‘develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world’, have ‘respect for others’ and ‘understand different beliefs and cultures’ (Education Scotland, 2013b). Education Scotland (2012) thus describes the promotion of diversity and equality as important elements of the CfE. In its guidance report to support schools in doing so it states:

All of us need to take account of everyone’s different needs and different points of view. In 21st century Scotland we celebrate our different cultures and backgrounds. We are confident about our diversity. (Education Scotland, 2012: 1)

This indicates a multicultural approach of ‘celebrating’ diversity. However, the guidance report also indicates the need for teachers to work more proactively in order to tackle issues of inequality, providing e.g. checklists for educational staff on reducing barriers to learning and ensuring a culture of inclusion and participation within the school. Thus, while employing a rhetoric of ‘celebrating diversity’ the CfE guidance also demands a more proactive stance on tackling inequalities. The document concludes that:

Through engaging in greater reflection, dialogue and debate about valuing and celebrating diversity we can further understand its importance. Through all our work in schools and communities, staff, children and young people will engage well in fostering good relations, take action to promote and advance equality of opportunity and successfully work towards eliminating discrimination. (Education Scotland, 2012: 19)

Furthermore, the Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 (amended 2009) places duties on education authorities to identify, meet and keep under review the additional needs of pupils, such as e.g. through disability, bullying or having English as an additional language. The Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc. Act 2000 also requires schools to meet the diverse needs of all their pupils (HM Inspectorate of Education, 2006).

#### **4.2.2.5 The National Framework for Inclusion**

The Framework for Inclusion was funded by the Scottish Government and developed through the Scottish Teacher Education Committee (STEC) in 2009 in order to guide students and teachers in Scotland towards developing knowledge and understanding of inclusive education. It covers values and beliefs as well as professional skills and abilities for inclusion. Specifically, it asks teachers to consider ‘the issues of language, ethnicity, social class and poverty, specific learning difficulties, more able children, Scottish travelling communities and looked after children’ (Scottish Teacher Education Committee, 2009).

#### **4.2.2.6 Activating Scottish policies in Greenstone Primary**

The above sections have summarised the key policy texts which shape the institutional discourses around equality, difference and diversity in Scottish schools.

Similar to the Equality Act 2010, many of these policies and legislations were rarely referred to explicitly in the school context, but their principles and terminology were visible throughout the fieldwork and shaped everyday life in school. Many of the school’s practices are rooted in relevant legislation (and its historical predecessors), such as the provision of EAL teaching for bilingual pupils (Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004 (amended 2009)). The school’s efforts to communicate with parents from a range of cultural backgrounds and involve them in school events were in line with principles of the Early Years Framework. Opportunities for ‘celebrating diversity’ were created regularly as stipulated in the GIRFEC approach and outlined in more detail in section 4.3.1.

The Curriculum for Excellence was often drawn upon in terms of shaping the terminology and practices around diversity. The CfE’s focus on responsible citizenship (defined, amongst other things, as having ‘respect for others’ and ‘understanding different beliefs and cultures’ (Education Scotland, 2013b)), for example, was implemented by the class teacher by awarding a weekly ‘Super Citizen’ certificate to a child. These certificates were handed out on the basis of the children having made ‘right choices’ such as ‘helping others’ or ‘taking on



responsibility' (fieldnotes from 1 December 2011). However, the scope of the certificate was somewhat undermined by the teacher ensuring that every child would be Super Citizen at least once, and therefore awarding the roles slightly randomly at times. This illustrates the complexity of equality measures in the classroom context, and the importance of teachers' interpretations of what constitutes equality, which are elaborated further below.

Taken together, Scottish policies and their activation by staff in Greenstone Primary generate particular discourses around diversity. While the Equality Act 2010 does not enforce its section on socio-economic discrimination, many of the Scottish policies extend their scope to socio-economic inequality or poverty (e.g. GIRFEC, Early Years Framework, CfE, Framework for Inclusion all mention professionals' responsibilities to recognise and address socio-economic inequalities)<sup>29</sup>.

Although there is a general overlap in terminology around social differences, there are also tensions within and between Scottish policies between constructing a discourse of *celebrating diversity*, on the one hand, and *tackling inequality*, on the other hand. Most of these texts do not define the terms diversity or inequality, and therefore their meanings remain blurred. It appears that the terminology of *tackling inequality* often refers to socio-economic inequalities, whereas the phrase of *celebrating diversity* generally is used to refer to ethnic diversity. There thus seems to be an implicit assumption that socio-economic inequality is rooted in a redistributive conceptualisation of social justice, whereas ethnic diversity requires social justice approaches of recognition ('celebration') (Fraser, 1997). As I show in the following sections, this results in a similar tension between these blurred concepts for staff in the school context.

Another noticeable aspect in Scottish policies around equality and diversity is that gender does not feature significantly in them. This resonates with Forbes et al.'s (2011: 766) claim that gender is an 'invisible' category in Scottish educational

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<sup>29</sup> In addition, the Child Poverty Act 2010 requires Scottish ministers to produce a strategy on tackling child poverty every three years.

policies. The authors argue that recent education and inclusion policies are characterised by the introduction of antiracist elements, as well as issues of social class and religion (particularly sectarianism), with the consequence of a ‘systemic, structural and institutional’ silencing of gender.

Finally, Scottish educational policies do not mention any *intersecting* forms of inequality or discrimination. This is particularly significant given the above described tensions between tackling inequality and celebrating diversity, which implicitly conceptualise different categories of difference (e.g. social class *or* ethnicity) as sitting differently within dimensions of social justice. A lack of concrete guidance on how to reduce these policies to practice (also identified by Konstantoni (2011)) means that difficulties from this tension are not addressed, arising, for example, when ‘in practice, pursuing certain dimensions of social justice will inevitably mean neglecting, or sacrificing, others’ (Gewirtz, 2006: 70).

### **4.2.3 Policies on-site: City Council and Greenstone Primary**

The local authority in which this study took place regularly releases policies in order to guide schools and nurseries to be ‘more than compliant’ with equalities legislation (City Council, 2009: 2). At the time of this research, the relevant policy referred to the six key strands of ‘race’, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation and faith/belief (City Council, 2009). It is noticeable that, in line with the Equality Act 2010, social class is missing from the list of characteristics. The policy stipulates that schools need to record and report to the Education Authority any incidents of bullying or discrimination on the grounds of ‘race, disability, gender, faith and sexual orientation’ (again social class, and also age, are missing from this list, in line with the Equality Act 2010). Discrimination on the grounds of these categories are described as ‘of equal concern and are all clearly distinguishable’. This indicates a stance which neglects intersectional forms of discrimination. The policy states further that staff should educate children about equality through the curriculum. Furthermore, the City Council published guidance on anti-racism and anti-bullying in

schools which regulates the reporting of incidents and demands schools to work pro-actively and preventatively (although without clear specification as to *how*) (City Council, 2007). In addition, the City Council also developed a project with schools which aimed at developing children's mental health and emotional well-being through a focus on positive interactions, relationships and developing a sense of meaning and belonging.

In interviews with educational staff, most referred to these policies, guidelines and project of the local authority when asked about policies which shaped the school's practices around difference and diversity. These policies were also used as guidelines to develop the school's internal policies and practices. In terms of bullying or discrimination incidents, for example, Greenstone Primary has developed its own 'Positive Behaviour Management' policy which involves an approach of using so-called 'reflection sheets'. If a discriminatory incident occurs, all the children involved are required to fill in the reflection sheet in order to have their viewpoints heard (with the help of staff if they cannot write yet). The sheet involves questions on what happened, who was involved, how did the child feel and assume the others involved would feel, what rights or responsibilities that the school upholds were broken, and what can be done now. The children involved are then invited to a discussion facilitated by staff to talk through the event on the basis of the reflection sheets. The reflection sheet illustrates a rights-based approach, guided by the UNCRC and RSSA procedure as well as by principles of restorative practice<sup>30</sup>, and addresses different forms of discrimination:

Our policy is affected by having rights, everyone having rights, so it doesn't matter if the incident did or didn't involve gender or 'race' or involved other things, we would handle those all in that same way. So those school policies about going through that kind of process [are] affected by what we

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<sup>30</sup> Restorative practice approaches aim to promote harmonious relationships in schools and successful resolution of conflict and harm. They are developed on the levels of school ethos, policies and procedures and involve preventative as well as responsive practices. As a key principle, the 'wrongdoer' is involved in the solution of the problem. (Education Scotland, 2013a)

believe [are] important values for the individuals in school.  
(Interview with Senior Management Staff, 20 June 2012)

It was stressed by staff that policies were the subject of constant review and development:

It's one of these things that we *do* need to keep looking at, the policy and new things that happen in education, or within society, or within school. Or it occurs to you that actually we're not really taking account of this aspect so let's go back and look at it again. So I don't think it's done and dusted, no.  
(Interview with Senior Management Staff, 20 June 2012)

The quote illustrates how the social relations of the school, within the institutional discourses of education and society more widely, impact on how policies around diversity and equality need to be changed and adapted. Responding to constantly changing social and legislative contexts also requires the school to take a proactive stance in order to remain up-to-date. While staff described this as a positively experienced challenge in the interviews, it was also presented as a difficult task, especially regarding a perceived lack of support from outwith the school:

I think as a city there aren't many people who could advise us at the moment that I'm aware of, that are far ahead, there is the restorative practice and there are some teachers you know really trying to push the edges of that, but it's not many.  
(Interview with Senior Management Staff, 20 June 2012)

This statement resonates with the lack of guidance on how to put policies into practice pointed out earlier. The interviewee refers to restorative practices as a guiding framework on how to deal with issues of conflict and promote respectful relationships in the school (Education Scotland, 2013a). Her statement, however, gives the impression that this guidance is relatively isolated and not used by many, and is ultimately not satisfying in helping to work with diversity and issues of discrimination.

It seemed in the course of the staff interviews and during the fieldwork that management and teaching staff's knowledge of policy, legislation and relevant practice guidance was more developed than support staff's. This is illustrated in the following statement from a member of the support staff:

I've been on courses, you know, for dyslexia, for special needs, but it's nothing to do with the diversity of the individual child, of their ... you know, what they need! I've never done a language course. [...] I have done loads and loads of courses, we do the maths courses... and which helps, all these courses help. But I wouldn't... I wouldn't know what sort of class you would go for...uhm...diversity, you know. For children being diverse. (Interview with Support Staff, 4 June 2012)

The member of staff describes her professional development and, while it contains some elements of inclusive practices (e.g. 'dyslexia, special needs'), she does not relate or find it useful in relation to other forms of diversity or inequality issues. This perceived lack of guidance and training is noteworthy since support staff do a huge part of the work with the 'diverse' group of learners within the school, e.g. by regularly working with smaller groups who need additional support in their learning.

Section 4.2 has outlined the global, UK, Scottish, local authority and on-site policies and legislations, and the particular ways in which they generate discourses around equality, difference and diversity. It has already described how these texts are referred to to different extents in Greenstone Primary, and some of the particular ways in which they are activated. In the following sections, I now move on to explore in more depth how staff conceptualise diversity and difference in Greenstone Primary, and the particular institutional context this creates for the children's social identities.

## **4.3 Institutional discourses of ‘the diverse primary school’**

In the previous sections I have located Greenstone Primary within its particular social, cultural and policy/legislative context. I have drawn specific attention to the representational level of analysis, i.e. how texts and legislations construct diversity (Yuval-Davis, 2006a). Drawing on interviews and observations, in this section I now explore the particular discourses around ‘diversity’ that are created in this process, and that construct the ‘diverse primary school’ in certain ways. As will become clear, this process is mediated by staff’s personal values and perspectives, and creates particular, and sometimes ambiguous, institutional discourses around diversity.

### **4.3.1 ‘Celebrating diversity’**

As already transpiring in the previous sections, staff at Greenstone Primary employ a rhetoric of ‘celebrating diversity’. This phrase is used on the school website, in the school handbook as well as in conversations around social and cultural differences in the school, and resonates with the terminology used in policy documents, such as GIRFEC and the Curriculum for Excellence. This section takes a closer look at how staff describe this ‘celebration’, and provides examples of how it is translated into everyday practices.

The following interview excerpt from a member of the school’s management staff firmly locates diversity at the heart of the school’s institutional discourse:

I think [diversity] is a crucial part of the identity of the school. Uhm.. and I think it matters on all levels of interactions for me, within my role, but also for the expectations that I have for all the other staff in the building. Uhm.. because those are all different examples of life, of human experience. [...] The core values that we hold as a management team, that we want the staff to exhibit and the children to see modelled and to use themselves are all connected to diversity, and having that as something we

uphold and celebrate. (Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012)

In this excerpt, the interviewee describes ‘respect’ for ‘different examples of life, of human experience’ as a basic underlying value of the school. This institutional discourse expects all staff to behave in a certain way (to ‘exhibit’ these values) in order to serve as role models for the children, and so provides ‘the terms under which what people do becomes institutionally accountable’ (Smith, 2005a: 113). There is thus a general expectation on everyone in the school to live according to and contribute to this discourse of ‘celebrating diversity’. The following excerpt gives an insight into what this celebration of diversity entails:

Human experience as a whole, not just in school, is about enjoying and celebrating things in life, whether those are festivals, whether those are important transition points in life, weddings, birthdays, those basic things that we all enjoy, or should enjoy, and we have the right to enjoy. Uhm... those present themselves here in a really rich way. Because we have the diversity that we have within the school community, so there are lots more opportunities to celebrate that for individuals and to gain an understanding of that within a classroom setting. [...]

Not just a video on TV of how someone in another country celebrates a wedding, which is fine, but it’s much more meaningful when it’s a child in the class. And whatever we’re celebrating, all the festivals and celebrations that come round, whether they’re religious, not-religious, they have different ways of being marked. (Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012)

This excerpt sums up much of what the school’s work around celebrating diversity entails, and resonates with my fieldwork observations. Indeed, cultural celebrations were at the heart of these practices, and involved both Western and more specific British or Scottish traditions (e.g. Christmas, Easter, Halloween, the Queen’s Jubilee, Robert Burns Night) as well as non-Western traditions (e.g. Diwali, Chinese New Year). They included both confessional and secular traditions, however, even those festivals with religious origins were celebrated by drawing mostly on cultural, rather than confessional elements (drawing on the distinction by Wilson (2012)). This meant that, while religious origins, e.g. for Christmas, were mentioned, celebrations

in school focused on cultural practices, e.g. giving presents, eating certain foods, singing songs, and writing Christmas cards. This near-omission of religious aspects could be interpreted as staff's attempts to make such festivals more inclusive for children holding different religious beliefs, or may also reflect staff's personal non-religious attitudes. When explaining the religious origins of festivals, it was made clear that these were endorsed only by particular groups (e.g. 'Christians believe...').

Through such practices Greenstone Primary adopted a multicultural approach to 'celebrating diversity' (Klein, 1993). Some multicultural approaches have been criticised as 'shallow' (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2008: 42) for incorporating only superficial elements of cultural heritage in a rather symbolic or tokenistic way (as described by Troyna's (1984) 'three S's' – *saris*, *samosas* and *steel bands*). Greenstone Primary's practices reflect a deeper multicultural approach, adopting strategies of representation, relevance and responsive pedagogies (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2008). *Representation strategies* involved making sure that diversity was represented visually and textually in the curriculum. In addition to devoting time to talk about and celebrate cultural events, they also entered the classroom by being incorporated into the curriculum in more subtle ways, for example by designing themed literacy and maths exercises. The curriculum thus served as a complex and comprehensive medium for cultural transmission of both Western and non-Western traditions. This meant that a *relevance strategy* was adopted by addressing and incorporating children's diverse interests and everyday lives through activities and themed exercises (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2008). Finally, staff at Greenstone Primary also adopted a *responsiveness strategy*, which refers to teachers' use of 'everyday language, culture and practices' in order to engage their students and build bridges between their lives within and beyond school (Gewirtz and Cribb, 2008: 42).

Language was a particularly important element of how diversity was conceptualised in Greenstone Primary. In the class of this study, for example, nine different languages were spoken by the children. While this led to challenges, as outlined below, multilingualism was also emphasised in very positive ways, as the following conversation in the classroom shows:



Ms Brown asks Damien what day it is today. He says: I know it, but I don't know what it's called!

She asks: Do you know it in French?

Damien: No.

Ms Brown: Well let's see if we can sound it out. Th...

Damien: Thursday!

Ms Brown: Yes!!

She looks at me and says: I actually don't know what it's called in French. We learn it at French class next week.

All the children already know that Ms Brown goes to French class, because she mentions it often.

Now Tahira says: Ms Brown, why do you go to French class?

Ms Brown says: Because I want to learn new things.

Tahira: But *why* do you want to learn new things?

Ms Brown: Because I looove learning new things, because there is so much in the world that I don't know, and I always want to know more. Because if you *know* more things you can also *do* more things. And when I was a child I didn't get a chance to learn other languages. You will all get a chance, and some of you already speak more than one language, for example Gabriel speaks Polish at home, don't you Gabriel?

Gabriel nods.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 12 January 2012]

In this situation, the teacher is aware of Damien's French mother tongue, and invites him to share the answer to her question in his language when he does not know it in English. She then uses the situation to emphasise the importance of life-long learning, and makes a connection between knowledge and opportunities ('if you *know* more things you can also *do* more things'). The knowledge of multiple languages is thus stressed as an important form of cultural capital (in the style of Bourdieu, 1986). This positive valuing of multilingualism is evident throughout life in the classroom, and children are often asked to translate words or phrases into their

languages (for example, learning how to say ‘good morning’ or ‘happy birthday’ in different languages). Diversity is therefore given an educational dimension and being able to navigate a diverse world, e.g. by speaking multiple languages, is presented as beneficial.

The classroom and other spaces around the school, such as the gym hall and corridors, were regularly decorated with diversity-themed work of the children, involving for example collages about the different cultures, languages and nationalities represented in school. The weekly assembly meeting, at which all pupils and staff (apart from administrative staff) gathered, was used by the head teacher to talk about and celebrate cultural events. The children were also encouraged to take an active part in shaping the discourse around diversity, by providing almost daily opportunities in the classroom for sharing stories about their family practices. When opportunities arose, the teacher also drew on children’s specific cultural knowledge and belonging. When Chinese New Year was celebrated, for example, she arranged with Raphael and his parents (who are Chinese) to bring in a dragon costume and share their practices and experiences of this tradition. However, also other children, who were not Chinese, were invited to share their knowledge about this cultural festival, for example by talking about their experiences of eating Chinese food. The school also organised events at which parents and children were invited to bring traditional dishes from their cultures. Such activities facilitated interactions with, and opened up the discursive space around ‘celebrating diversity’ to the world beyond the school and built bridges to the children’s home lives.

Summing up, these examples outline a strong multicultural discourse around ‘celebrating diversity’ in Greenstone Primary. However, it is also noticeable that this discourse constructs diversity by emphasising only certain dimensions of it: language, food customs, cultural and religious traditions. These aspects can be seen as dimensions of ethnicity. Other dimensions of ethnic diversity, such as skin colour, and additional aspects of difference, such as gender and social class, are relatively absent from the celebratory discourse. This resonates with critiques of multicultural approaches, which point out their failure to consider the complex power relations within and between different ethnic groups, and the wider social and economic

contexts which shape the different experiences of children in education (May, 1999; Vandenbroeck, 2007).

### 4.3.2 Challenging aspects of diversity

Whilst upholding the celebratory discourse as the primary rhetoric around diversity, staff at Greenstone Primary acknowledge that working with diversity ‘brings challenges’ (Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012). The diverse range of skills and abilities that children bring into the school are described as a key aspect of diversity:

Social diversity for me is about the skills that the children come in with... Because at the start of primary one, because we have such a wide diversity of cultures in our school, different nationalities in our school, and also, our children come... well, this year, from ten different nurseries. So it’s about socially how they are able to interact with each other and the social diversity comes down to ....for me... the skills that each of the children bring to my classroom. (Interview with Teaching Staff, 24 May 2012)

The interviewee goes on to distinguish both between academic and language skills, as well as social skills (‘being able to make friends, being confident’). She describes the diversity as rooted in the children’s backgrounds in terms of ‘different cultures, different nationalities, and different nurseries’, indicating a range of diversity both in terms of global and local geographical origins of the children (different nurseries may, in fact, be an indicator for socio-economic diversity, but she does not elaborate on this). Particularly language, and resulting communication issues, were described as demanding:

The language is a challenge. Depending on how well the children speak English or how well I understand. I mean I don’t speak any other language, so it’s not that they should understand what I’m saying and I’m the most important, but I think language... [...] I think yeah, *that* I find quite hard if it’s in a group especially. You depending on how diverse your group was. But it can be very diverse as you probably noticed yourself. (Interview with Support Staff, 4 June 2012)

The interviewee describes the challenges of her work, especially when there are not only one, but more additional languages involved in a group situation. She locates the problem of communication not only with the children who do not speak English well, but is also conscious of her own lack of other language knowledge and her powerful position as a native-speaking authority person. As an example of the difficulties of working with a variety of languages she retells a situation in which Umar, a boy in class whose mother tongue is Malay, seemed to be able to read English perfectly until at some point she realised that he did not understand the meaning of the words that he was reading out loud.

While the previous section has illustrated how language plays an important part in the celebratory discourse around diversity, these excerpts show that language, namely the lack of good knowledge of English, can at the same time be perceived as a challenge for both staff and children. The following statement illustrates that the dimensions of this challenge go beyond ‘factual’ communication and extend to relational and emotional issues:

I think that would probably be the hardest part, the language, because trying to comfort a child, if he doesn’t understand what you’re saying, or, trying for a child to tell you how upset they are, and you know, they can’t speak the language, either speaking either language, I think it’s sad for the child, and for the adult. (Interview with Support Staff, 4 June 2012)

The interviewee describes the challenging experience of a lack of mutual understanding, particularly when communicating about emotional experiences. Thus, language issues may not only impede on academic elements of the curriculum (e.g. learning to read), but also interfere with the caring roles that teaching staff assume (‘trying to comfort a child’). She reveals her deep empathy for the children and what such situations may feel like for them. While she describes language as the key element, ‘the hardest part’, in this struggle, there may also be additional cultural dimensions which have an impact on mutual understanding and communication.

### 4.3.3 Tackling discrimination

Despite the celebratory discourse around diversity, staff at Greenstone Primary are also very aware of the possibility of racist or discriminatory incidents. In addition to the multicultural approach of celebrating diversity, as outlined above, the school therefore also involves elements of anti-discriminatory practice, requiring its pupils to understand and deal with racism and other forms of discrimination (Gillborn, 1995). The following interview excerpt illustrates the necessity and effort required for a proactively anti-discriminatory stance:

Whilst we're proud of [our diversity], there are times when there are conflicts between individual children... and we need to have time put aside, to invest in the children, to have proper reflection on what that means. So that they can have a different viewpoint perhaps from the one that they have learned at home... or through media or through peers.  
(Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012)

The interviewee describes how reflecting on conflicts, and providing different (critical?) viewpoints requires time and effort from staff. Such a proactive and anti-discriminatory stance is in line with policy documents, such as equality policies from the local authority or the Curriculum for Excellence, which require a proactive engagement with, and incorporation into the curriculum, of issues around equality and discrimination. An example of such an anti-discriminatory approach was the celebration of Martin Luther King Day which involved an exercise during the assembly meeting requiring the children to imagine the effects of discrimination and stereotyping (the exercise required all children who wore shoe laces to stand up, while all others were allowed to remain seated, for a period of time, followed by a discussion of this experience).

Despite this proactive stance, however, discriminatory incidents are not easily picked up. During my fieldwork I became very conscious of how little of what is happening in the children's lives in school, whether during interactions in the classroom, in the lunch hall, corridors or on the playground, is actually witnessed by and within the surrounding adults' awareness (including myself). Moreover, it is ultimately decided

by staff whether an incident is classified as discriminatory. The following statement illustrates the range of what are classified as discriminatory events:

That has perhaps meant that [the children] have treated someone unfairly or cut them out of a game, or called them a racist name...when those things come to us [senior management], they are things that we deal with. So they impact on how we use our time and how we prioritise our time, we feel that's important. That the children hear that different voice, that no matter what colour, gender and so on, all the things you mentioned, that everyone here deserves to be treated with respect. Adults and children alike. Uhm... and that we don't shift from that. (Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012)

In line with local authority policies, discriminatory incidents need to be recorded and monitored on a yearly basis, and as outlined in previous sections, Greenstone Primary has its own practice of 'reflection sheets' in place in order to deal with such incidents. The interviewee defines the bases of discriminatory events quite broadly, including 'colour', gender, and 'all the things' I mentioned in my interview question (i.e. ethnicity, gender and social class). This indicates that, while the 'celebrating diversity' discourse constructs diversity mainly by drawing on certain aspects of ethnicity, difference is conceptualised much broader when it comes to discriminatory incidents – although there seems to be a focus particularly on issues of racism. Thus, Greenstone Primary's multicultural discourse on celebrating diversity is complemented by a more proactive, anti-racist stance when it comes to addressing discriminatory incidents.

#### **4.3.4 Missing from the discourse? Ambivalent aspects of diversity**

The previous sections have showed that the institutional discourses around difference and diversity, whether referring to celebration or tackling discrimination, mainly highlight dimensions of ethnicity. Consequently, other aspects, namely social class and gender, are rather absent in the terminology around diversity. This does not mean that staff do not contribute to how these are constructed in the school context, but in

fact this very absence qualifies the discourses around diversity in a particular way. In this section, I present and analyse staff's responses when asked about the significance of social class and gender in their work, and their place in the school's overall 'diversity', and present some examples of how social class and gender are constructed in practice.

#### **4.3.4.1 The case of social class**

Social class appeared to be a particularly 'silent' category in staff's conceptualisations of difference and diversity. The fact that social class was excluded from the rhetoric on difference and equality is also in line with some of the relevant legislation, as social class is also not included in the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 or local authority policy guidance based on it (although it *does* feature in many Scottish policies). When asked about the relevance of social class in interviews, all staff agreed that Greenstone Primary's pupils come from a wide variety of social class backgrounds, but differed on the relevance of this for the children's experiences in school:

I think there is a diversity in the social class background. Which I think is quite a good thing as well. [...] All of our children mix, you know, it doesn't seem to matter what class or what background they come from. I don't know about after school, but in the school and in the playground, no... I think it's fine. I think the children, you know, it's fine, there's ... you know the social part of it, children aren't always aware of it maybe. (Interview with Support Staff, 4 June 2012)

This interviewee holds a view of social class diversity in Greenstone Primary as inherently positive. She tentatively suggests that for the children this may not be of importance since they are 'not aware of it maybe'. She acknowledges that this may not be the case outwith the school, but stresses that there is no social class segregation within the school. This reminds of a 'no problem here' attitude as described in multicultural education literature (Ward and Eden, 2009: 142). By stressing social class diversity as positive, but at the same time downplaying its importance for the children, the statement has an ambivalent connotation: on the one hand, social class is constructed as significant in terms of social class diversity

contributing to a positive experience at school, but on the other hand social class is constructed as insignificant since children are not 'aware of it'. In a similar manner, the following interviewee conceptualises social class diversity as positive, but differentiates further on its relevance:

I think actually I do have quite a broad mix. It's not heavy one way or the other. And certainly, over the years, I mean not just talking about the experience here [in Greenstone Primary] but, I have seen that actually having an effect. Particularly if you've got quite well-to-do parents, and they maybe would perceive other children in a certain way. And that can transpire to the child. And because of the information and the reaction that they're getting from the parents socially, they would maybe avoid playing with certain children and I have seen that happen. (Interview with Teaching Staff, 24 May 2012)

The interviewee is firm in describing Greenstone Primary's school roll as representing a broad and balanced mix in terms of social class, 'not heavy one way or the other'. Drawing on her experience as a teacher over many years, and in different schools, she emphasises that social class *can* have an effect for children's relationships in school. It seems that she locates the cause for this effect with discriminatory or prejudiced attitudes of 'well-to-do parents', indicating a view of children as passive sponges of social class prejudice ('that can transpire to the child'). However, she quickly goes on to elaborate on the situation in Greenstone Primary:

Uhm, not necessarily here, I think, because we've got a much wider diversity here. And I think we're very lucky in this school that we have such a *wide* diversity that you don't get so much of the class differentiation quite so much. [...] In a culturally and class-mixed school, you don't get that nearly as much. [...] Because there is such a diversity, it's neither one thing or the other, and I think that helps. Nobody is from an upper class family, nobody is from a middle class family, nobody is from a lower class family. We're all just a family. (Interview with Teaching Staff, 24 May 2012)

The interviewee quickly asserts that in Greenstone Primary, social class is not a factor for children's relationships, for two reasons: First, because the social class mix



in itself is so diverse that it becomes less important for the children, and second, because the wide ‘cultural’ diversity in Greenstone Primary *distracts* from its social class diversity. This is certainly true for the ‘celebrating diversity’ discourse, which highlights some dimensions of ethnic diversity and mutes social class differences. Greenstone Primary is constructed as an exemplary case in contrast to ‘other’ schools in which social class was a factor for peer exclusion processes. This indicates again a ‘no problem here’ attitude, which presumably at least in part is caused by the interview situation and the interviewee’s intent to paint the school in a particular light. She constructs the school as an inclusive environment (‘we’re all just a family’) which can be interpreted as an aspirational egalitarian discourse.

One reason for downplaying the importance of social class may be a fear of stigmatising children because of their social class backgrounds, as becomes clear in the following interview excerpt:

For me it’s very important to see the individual, not to make decisions, he’s from a deprived home, so he’s like that.  
‘Cause that’s not the case, and I *know* that’s not the case, and I want to give that strong message to every child that I don’t make that assumption. (Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012)

The interviewee passionately describes her intention to treat every child in the same way, and to not let her own social class assumptions influence her perceptions or expectations of individual children. However, social class is implicitly constructed as problematic here, since her statement refers to children ‘from a deprived home’ which may be ‘like that’. On the other hand, the fact that staff may also have particular expectations of children from advantaged homes is not addressed. While the interviewee stresses her intention to view every child in the same way, she goes on to stress the importance of being considerate of how social class resources may impact on children’s diverse conditions:

But there are some things, and you need to be aware in decision making, about access to theatres for example. So in general, some of the children from more deprived situations may not have these opportunities outwith school, as often, whether it’s money or because that’s not what their families

and extended culture tends to do, perhaps. And perhaps more of the children from well-off home situations will perhaps go to theatre and opera and have music played at home and things like that and have people reading books, in the house as good role models, so yes from that point of view I guess uhm... we're aware and we try to facilitate that we can allow whole classes to access facilities like that. [...] We try to accommodate if parents come and say, you know, I can't manage, that then we'll find a way to make it happen.  
(Interview with Senior Management Staff, 13 June 2012)

In this excerpt, the interviewee stresses that the school management is aware, and needs to be sensitive to, children's different resources in terms of access to cultural facilities, such as theatres, as well as educational support and family practices at home, such as reading books. The interviewee perceives the school's role to be one of mediating, or counteracting, such differences, by providing the same opportunities and experiences to all children. Staff thus experience a tension between trying to be considerate of social class differences, on the one hand, and not wanting to be biased or prejudiced on the basis of them, on the other hand. In practice, this produces complex challenges of being sensitive to and considerate of social class differences, but at the same time not marking them explicitly, as in the following example of a conversation in the classroom:

The class is discussing an upcoming school trip, and the teacher invites questions about it.

There are many questions, such as: Where will the driver from the bus go? Will there be a toilet?

Ms Brown answers them all patiently.

Brenda: What happens if we have school lunch?

Ms Brown: You can't have school lunch that day, you have to take a packed lunch.

Carla raises her hand: I don't think my mum has a lot of food!

Ms Brown: Ohhh...

It looks as if she is just remembering that some children are on free school meals.

She says: Yes, if you get packed lunch on a Friday then you have to tell me and I will organise you a packed lunch! Who is it that has packed lunch on a Friday?

(Those are the children whose parents claim free school meals, who on Fridays get to take their packed lunch home.)

Carla, Amy and Asya raise their hands, and Ms Brown takes a note.

Laura: Do we have to dress in home clothes?

Ms Brown hesitates for a moment and says: Probably school uniform is the best thing.

Aamil: Yeah that's the best thing to be wearing.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 21 February 2012]

In this situation, the teacher seems not aware, until Carla points it out, that bringing their own lunch on a trip can be difficult for some families. Carla seems quite confident to point out that 'her mum does not have a lot of food', indicating that she may have had conversations about this topic with her mother. The teacher reacts quickly by enquiring who else is in the same situation and promising to solve it. She does this quite smoothly without delving into or making explicit the underlying economic resources. However, the topic seems to have reminded Laura of asking whether they 'have to' dress in home clothes. This phrasing suggests that she would rather wear her school uniform. Normally, on trips outside of school they are allowed to wear their 'home clothes' which is generally favoured by the children. The teacher, presumably aware of Laura's phrasing and sensitized through Carla's previous statement, decides that they should wear school uniforms, which is also welcomed by Aamil. The example shows how generally popular events, such as a school trip, can be stressful for those children whose families have fewer socio-economic resources at their disposal (Shropshire and Middleton, 1999; Ridge, 2002). However, in this situation, the children voice their concerns quite confidently and the teacher's move to render differences less visible by insisting on school uniforms even on a school trip seems to be welcomed also by the children.

While it was common for staff to draw upon dimensions of ethnicity to construct differences, there seemed to be no similar language or acceptability of such constructions of differences in relation to dimensions of social class. Rather, staff were negotiating a balance between trying to be considerate of, but at the same time silencing, or ‘smoothing out’, social class differences. Issues of inequality thus interfere with the *celebratory* discourse when it comes to diversity in terms of social class backgrounds. This resonates with the lack of clear definitions of ‘diversity’ and ‘inequality’, as well as a lack of concrete guidance on how to deal with them in practice, as outlined in my analysis of policy documents. The muting of some differences (social class) as opposed to the marking of others (certain dimensions of ethnicity), also neglects the acknowledgement of their potential intersections and produces complex challenges for promoting equality in the everyday school context.

#### **4.3.4.2 The case of gender**

In interviews I gained the impression that diversity in terms of gender, in a gender-mixed primary school like Greenstone Primary, was considered to be the norm and self-evident and therefore did not need to be emphasised. Therefore, gender diversity was not part of the ‘celebratory discourse’. When asked about its relevance, however, staff identified gender as an important element of diversity, especially in intersection with other aspects:

Yeah, I would say gender does have a play in it! [...] Girls almost by nature (*chuckles*) tend to be more chatty, and it tends to be out in the playground that it’s all the mums standing and chatting together. They maybe don’t see their dads chatting quite so much. ...but I think it’s a mix of things. It’s also linked with the age factor, how old, how mature they are... Their home background, whether they’ve got older brothers and sisters, whether they’re an only child, that can have an effect. Are they used to talking and interacting with other children? Are they treated differently at home, you know is the son treated differently to a daughter, that can come back to cultural differences as well. In some families, the male is revered in a sort of very high status, and the woman is not, it can be a lot of different factors.  
(Interview with Teaching Staff, 24 May 2012)

This statement entails a number of different conceptualisations of gender. At first, the interviewee emphasises the relevance of gender in terms of differing styles of social interactions (e.g. girls being ‘more chatty’). She thus essentialises gendered behaviours by contrasting ‘the boys’ versus ‘the girls’. Although it appears jokingly, she refers to gender as a biological category (‘by nature’), but quickly relativises this by emphasising the role of parents in modelling gendered behaviours which the children are picking up on, and thus refers to a socialisation model of gender identities (Skelton and Francis, 2003). Parents are casually referred to as heterosexual couples (‘mums and dads’), demonstrating the significance of heteronormative constructions of gender identity and role models. She points out the stronger involvement of mothers in their children’s schooling and education, and its potential effects on how children negotiate gender roles. However, the interviewee is also sensitive to the intersectional complexity of gender in relation to age, family composition and practices, and cultural background. She refers to differential treatment and gendered power divisions within particular ethnic groups (Mirza, 1992; Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006). This intersection between gender and culture, and specifically in relation to gender inequalities, was also acknowledged through Greenstone Primary’s participation in a UK-wide awareness-raising campaign to highlight barriers to girls’ education in the Majority World during this study.

The fact that gender was often perceived as a ‘matter-of-course’, self-evident form of difference within the school, meant it did not feature explicitly, or receive much consideration, in terms of its role within the school’s institutional discourse on diversity. However, interactions between staff and children were highly gendered, and gender was often foregrounded as an aspect of social difference. Gender was also significant for children’s perceptions of justice and fairness, and children often challenged staff’s practices when they were perceived as privileging either ‘the girls’ or ‘the boys’. In this context, gendered interactions such as the following were quite common:

Before the Christmas holidays, Ms Brown has organised a party in class.

We start with playing 'pass the parcel'. All the children sit in a circle on the ground, handing the parcel around. Each time the music stops (which Ms Brown controls), whoever holds the parcel can open one layer. Between each two layers there is a plastic gold coin.

We are playing two rounds, with twelve gold coins each, so that every child gets at least one gold coin, and both parcels contain one main present in the centre: the 'boys' present' is a pot of goo, and the 'girls' present' is a set of plastic pearls to make bracelets.

Before the game starts, Ms Brown asks me to give her an inconspicuous nod when the parcel is approaching a girl / boy respectively for the last present, so that the appropriate present goes to the appropriate gender.

Then she turns her back to the children, so they don't think that she is cheating, but she looks at me, and waits for my nods.

With this manipulation of the game, Joshua wins the first round, and Amy the second.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 21 December 2011]

In this case, the teacher (with my assistance!) has manipulated the usually random game of pass-the-parcel in order to make sure that every child receives at least one gold coin, and that the two main presents are going to both a boy and a girl. Thus, she prioritises gender as an aspect of social justice in this situation. She could have picked the two winners based on different criteria, e.g. ethnicity, social class, ability, age, or just left it to the random game to bring out a winner. Her decision to foreground gender may be due to the fact that this is the most salient aspect of social justice for her. Possibly, she wanted to avoid a situation in which both presents went to boys, or girls, which may have caused discontent or conflict in the group. However, while on the one hand trying to avoid a gender 'inequality', by ensuring that both a boy and a girl win the game once, on the other hand the process ties into and consolidates gender stereotypes by offering two 'gendered' presents and making sure that each present goes to the 'appropriate' gender. Thus, the game also establishes a powerful binary in terms of gender roles, and thus contains a paradox in relation to establishing gender equality.

In the above situation, the teacher has foregrounded gender implicitly: the children are not aware that the game has been manipulated in order for a boy and a girl to win once, and the fact that the prizes have been selected based on gendered assumptions is not addressed. At other times, gender is explicitly foregrounded in teacher practices:

Ms Brown calls the children onto the carpet area. She rehearses the ‘common words’, like every morning, and says that the boys don’t know them well enough. She says this is because the boys are always playing in the construction area or role play area when they have ‘free choice’, and never do the literacy activities. She says: You all have to learn *all* the common words, and therefore today I am going to ban the boys from the construction area and the role play area!

A murmur goes through the group, this is an unusual step for Ms Brown. She says: You have to learn *all* of the common words!

Raphael protests: But I know them all!

His voice is low, and I am not sure if Ms Brown can’t hear him or is just ignoring him.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 8 March 2012]

In this situation, the teacher decides to take ‘positive action’ measures (in line with the Technical Guidance for Schools in Scotland (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013c) on how to implement the Equality Act 2010) in order to address her concern that the boys are performing worse than the girls in terms of learning the ‘common words’. The measure consists of banning ‘all the boys’ from the construction area (Lego and building blocks) and the role play area (at that time featuring a toy farm). Since these areas are generally considered to be the ‘fun’ areas in the classroom, her intervention has the connotation of a penalty. The generalisation of boys, as opposed to girls, not knowing the common words, draws on gender as a marker of differences in academic achievement, and risks attributing wrong labels to some of the children. In fact, it is very likely that some boys *do* know the common words, and some girls *do not*. Indeed, Raphael (unsuccessfully) challenges the teacher’s differentiation based on gender, although over the course of

the following days she upholds the division but introduces exceptions for him and other boys.

There may be a number of reasons for which the teacher decides to construct gender as the basis for differences in achievement. First, this ties into academic and social discourses of boys as underachievers in school (Renold, 2001a; 2001b; Reay, 2003; Raphael Reed, 2006), which may have influenced her perception of boys as more 'problematic' learners. Second, during my fieldwork the children often constructed their gender identities in an antagonistic way (cf. Thorne, 1993) including competitive dynamics between girls and boys (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). It is possible that the teacher hints at this competition between boys and girls in order to fuel the children's ambition to outperform the other gender. However, this also has the effect of strengthening the competitive dynamics even further. Third, gender (and, on other occasions, age) is a category which can be 'acceptably' drawn upon in this way in the school context. How well the children know the common words is presumably influenced by a number of factors, such as personal abilities, age and maturity, educational support at home, language issues, constitution on the day, etc. However, it would be unthinkable to construct an equivalent distinction in terms of ethnicity or social class, as this would be considered highly discriminatory. Drawing on gender, therefore, may serve as a distraction from other aspects of diversity which may be the causes of children's unequal performances. However, there is also an implication that the boys are performing worse by personal *choice* (they don't spend enough time at the literacy tables), and therefore academic success is reduced to personal responsibility, not taking into consideration those aspects of their academic performances over which the children have little or no control, e.g. parental support.

It became clear during the fieldwork that for both children and staff, equality generally means treating everyone in the same way. However, when this is not practicable, staff need to make situated decisions on which aspects of difference to foreground, and which dimensions of social justice to pursue. As in the examples used in this section, gender is often foregrounded as a category of difference in such situations: sometimes implicitly (e.g. manipulating the pass-the-parcel game without telling the children), and sometimes explicitly (e.g. creating an openly gendered



distinction of academic achievement and conduct). This illustrates the complex process of making situated social justice decisions, which are both shaped by the institutional discourses on diversity as well as at the same time related to the personal values of staff (cf. Gewirtz, 2006), producing complex demands on working with diversity.

#### **4.3.5 Normative understandings: ‘unhealthy’ differences**

The previous sections have showed that staff in Greenstone Primary navigate tensions between *muting* certain kinds of differences (e.g. social class) on the assumption that all children are equal and should be treated in the same way, and *celebrating* other kinds of (ethnic) differences. Other differences sit ambivalently within this tension: gender differences, for example, are neither muted nor celebrated; they are often foregrounded in implicit or explicit ways, yet rarely problematized. In this section I take a closer look at *how* decisions to mark or mute certain categories of difference are made, and how these decisions are invested with values.

As outlined earlier, the school management in Greenstone Primary creates clear expectations for all members of staff to model and uphold a celebratory discourse of diversity. However, what ‘diversity’ means in particular situations, and how it is invested with values, depends to a large extent on the personal lenses of staff involved, as illustrated in the following fieldnotes excerpt:

In the lunch hall, a member of staff comes up to me and says in front of the children: Did you see what some of the children have in their lunch boxes? Cold, fried food. Well I guess it’s cultural. But it’s so unhealthy.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 23 February 2012]

In this situation, which left me feeling quite uncomfortable, ‘cultural’ is given a meaning which differs strongly from the celebratory discourse. The staff member classifies the lunches of *some* children (in this case, children who were not ‘white

British') as unhealthy and, although she appreciates that views on what constitutes 'healthy' food may differ depending on people's cultural backgrounds, 'culturally different' food is valued negatively. This shows that, while the institutional discourse promotes a celebratory attitude towards diversity, staff negotiate how they reduce this into their everyday practices through their own personal meanings, and this may well conflict with the celebratory discourse.

In this example, the staff's negative construction of cultural difference was directed mainly at me (although within hearing distance of some children). On many occasions, however, differences were marked and valued in direct interactions with children. An example of such an interaction was a practice called 'the snack list', which was introduced in the class of this study at some point during the fieldwork. The teacher explained to me that she was concerned about the unhealthy snacks which some children brought in for the morning break, particularly Amy and Alba. In order to urge the children to bring in more healthy snacks, she announced that from now on she would check what everyone brought in every day. On a list, she marked if the children brought in healthy snacks (to which she counted fruit, raisins, cereal bars, oatcakes) or unhealthy snacks (chocolate, biscuits, cake, crisps). Every child was allowed one 'treat' per week, and if they received four ticks for healthy snacks (or no snacks) on the list, they received a star sticker to wear on their clothes. The teacher had deliberately not informed the parents of this new practice, since she wanted the change to be initiated by the children themselves. Thus, while in fact the system was targeted at some particular children, she rolled it out to the whole class. It was therefore conceived as a universal practice, but produced very different experiences for different children as the following excerpt shows:

It is break time. The children line up and Ms Brown does the snack check list again. Alba today has a cereal bar, and Ms Brown praises her: Well done Alba, for the first time today you've got a healthy snack, well done!

Alba is beaming with joy. Ms Brown goes through the list and everyone has something healthy, fruit, cereal bars. Patrick has cheese, which Ms Brown also classifies as healthy.

Next in the list is Leo. Ms Brown shouts: Leo!

Leo mumbles: A muffin.

Ms Brown takes a look at his plastic box: Not good Leo, muffin is like cake, that's not good.

And she makes a cross next to his name.

I can see Leo is tearing up, but he holds the tears back. He is standing in line next to Patrick, who now says to him, imitating Ms Brown's tone: Leo hasn't got a healthy snack, not good Leo!

Leo says to Patrick: It's not my fault!

His voice is shaky. The teacher cannot hear this.

Amy is standing very close to me, she is still putting on her jacket and not in line yet. Now she comes over to me and waves me to bend down so she can whisper in my ear: Marlies, I don't want to eat my snack.

Amy has regularly been told off over the last days because she has always had chocolates for snack.

I ask, silently: What have you got?

She whispers: Chocolate. But I don't want to eat it.

I whisper back: That's ok.

In this moment, the teacher shouts: Amy!

Amy looks at the teacher. I am standing next to them, but Amy doesn't look at me. She holds the gaze of the teacher for a few seconds and I realise I am holding my breath. Then she says: No snack.

The teacher writes down: No snack.

I can see that Amy is clasping her snack in her pocket.

The children go down onto the playground. I want to follow Amy but I lose her out of my sight. After a few minutes I see her again. I ask: Did you eat your snack? She says, it seems defensively: Nooo!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 17 January 2012]

This excerpt gives an insight into the children's differing experiences of the snack list system. For those children who regularly have 'healthy snacks', the snack list does not seem to be of particular importance, or seems to be indeed perceived positively. In fact, Patrick constructs his superiority of having a healthy snack by mocking Leo for not having one. For those children who do not regularly receive ticks for healthy snacks, like Alba, Leo and Amy, the snack list seems to be a highly emotional and challenging experience. Leo is upset that his muffin was classified as unhealthy, and he points out (but only to Patrick) that this was not his fault. Amy decides to conceal her snack, and rather goes without snack than receiving another cross next to her name, and suffering the negative labelling attached to this. While on the surface, the snack list expects the same from all children, and thus is intended as treating and making everyone the same, it does in fact represent and implement the school's dominant perspective on what is considered to be 'healthy'. While food, as in the celebratory discourse outlined above, is often stressed as a positive marker of cultural diversity, in this case 'healthy food' is constructed from a specific (dominant) cultural and classed position.

This resonates with Bundgaard and Gulløv's (2006) study of a Danish pre-school institution which found that, while staff tried to view all children as equal, and to treat them as such, distinctions were in practice established when children behaved in ways to be considered inappropriate for their long-term interests. In the case of Greenstone Primary, these long-term interests were pursued by upholding staff's cultural and classed meanings and values. Differences which deviated from this discourse and were perceived as 'unhealthy' were sought to be assimilated to dominant practices. Thus, the way in which the celebratory discourse around diversity is constructed and implemented is highly dependent on staff's (classed, gendered, cultural etc.) values as constructed in particular situations. It follows that only those differences classified as positive can be celebrated, whereas other forms of differences are sought to be annihilated through a normative understanding of children's 'best interests'.

However, the example also shows that children are actively engaged in the processes of constructing these meanings and values. The way in which the teacher has

implemented the snack list illustrates that she believes in the children's agency to effect a change in their own eating habits. Indeed, the way in which the children negotiate the snack list shows that they *do* actively co-construct the meaning of their snacks. Amy's hiding of her snack can be interpreted as a form of resistance. Another example is Raphael, who after receiving 'unhealthy' crosses for his Chinese biscuits multiple times, protests so long that the teacher decides to classify his biscuits as healthy. This illustrates that children do indeed have some agency to perform their social identities differently within the tensions of the institutional discourse. However, the practice of the snack list highlights the limitations of children's agency in choosing their snacks, since these choices are highly dependent on their relationships with adults – their parents – as well as their families' wider social and cultural backgrounds (Lee, 1998; Tisdall and Punch, 2012).

## 4.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has presented the complex and multifaceted discourses around difference and diversity in Greenstone Primary which construct social class, gender and ethnicity in particular ways.

I have started by describing the neighbourhood and social context in which the school is located, and how this contributes to its self-characterisation as a 'multicultural school'. Then I have identified and analysed the relevant legislative and policy landscape, on a global, British, Scottish, local authority and school level, and explored how it shapes the terminology and practices around diversity in Greenstone Primary.

The identified texts construct difference and diversity in various, sometimes ambivalent ways. As I have showed, Scottish policies are characterised by a focus on ethnic and socio-economic elements, but rarely include gender into considerations of social justice. Intersecting dimensions of discrimination have been recognised to some extent only by the Equality Act 2010 (although described as insufficient and ineffective (Solanke, 2011)), and are relatively absent from Scottish policies. Moreover, a tension between the terminology of 'celebrating diversity', on the one hand, and 'tackling inequality', on the other hand, can be identified in Scottish policies, along with a lack of clarity on how these concepts are defined.

In showing how these texts are activated and implemented by staff in Greenstone Primary, an ambivalent picture of the institutional discourses around diversity emerges which construct and prioritise the categories of ethnicity, gender and social class in different ways. Staff at Greenstone Primary employ a rhetoric of 'celebrating diversity', which is implemented via multicultural practices of emphasising certain dimensions of ethnicity (language, food customs, cultural and religious traditions). This particular construction of diversity thus neglects other aspects of ethnicity, such as skin colour, and gender and social class, which remain mostly outside the celebratory discourse. Exactly because of such exclusions, multicultural discourses

with a sole focus on diversity have been critiqued as ‘a politics of feeling good, which allows people to relax and feel less threatened, as if we have already “solved it” and there is nothing less to do’ (Ahmed, 2012: 207). Such a view allows diversity to become a ‘brand’ attached to institutions (e.g. the ‘diverse’ primary school, university, etc.). Similarly, Anthias (2013b: 324) points out that discourses around diversity and integration which focus on culture tend to imply a static, a-historical and essentialist notion of culture as ‘divorced from the structural and material’.

In addition to multicultural discourses of ‘celebrating diversity’, staff at Greenstone Primary also adopt elements of anti-discriminatory practice. However, also anti-discriminatory practices in the school focus mainly on aspects of ethnicity and anti-racist approaches, and social class and gender often remain excluded from the discourse of ‘tackling discrimination’. This resonates with Burman’s (2003) concept of ‘race anxiety’. She describes this as a fear of being found to be racist on the part of institutions, which leads to the prioritisation of issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity and the neglect of other aspects of difference and inequality.

The relative absence of gender and social class from staff’s discourses of ‘celebrating diversity’ and ‘tackling discrimination’ does, of course, not take away from their relevance in Greenstone Primary, but contributes to the very ways in which these categories are constructed within the school context. The result is an ambivalent institutional discourse around diversity, in which some differences are marked, and some are muted. Some aspects of difference sit ambiguously within the discourse: for example, language diversity has been both celebrated as well as described as a challenge. Other differences, such as gender, are neither particularly marked nor muted within the discourse, but often constructed in unproblematised and naturalised ways (exemplified, for example, through rather stereotypical assumptions about gendered traits and behaviours). These processes of constructing differences are dependent on staff’s values and situated decisions on which aspects of diversity and difference to foreground, and shaped by normative assumptions about what constitutes children’s ‘best interests’. At the same time, by foregrounding certain dimensions of differences, these dimensions are constructed as salient aspects of children’s social identities. An example was the foregrounding of gender as

described in section 4.3.4.2, which prioritized aspects of gender over other dimensions of difference, e.g. social class, in terms of the children's academic performances.

Summing up, this Chapter has outlined complex and contradictory institutional discourses around 'diversity'. Tensions and ambiguities in the relevant policies and legislations between 'diversity' and 'inequality' fail to address the different underlying dimensions of social justice (in terms of recognition, redistribution, and representation (Fraser, 1997)) in relation to ethnicity, gender and social class, and these tensions are reflected in staff's discourses and practices. The analysed texts also neglect the intersecting nature of categories of difference, and this created particular discourses around diversity in Greenstone Primary which led to the foregrounding of single aspects of diversity. However, I have also showed how the activation of texts and the generation of particular discourses is mediated by staff's situated values and norms around social diversity, and this leads to continuously changing and adapting discourses around diversity and difference in Greenstone Primary.

In showing how diversity and inequality are constructed in different policy documents, and the tensions that are produced in this process, as well as the ways in which such texts are then activated by staff, this Chapter has showed the complex links between representational, organisational and experiential aspects of how social categories are constructed (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; 1992; Yuval-Davis, 2006b). This shows that while the ways in which children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity are situated within interactions and relationships in the primary school, this context is at the same time shaped by, and reflects, wider structural aspects of intersections.

Rather than demanding clearer guidance on how to put legislation and policy around diversity and inequality into practice (Konstantoni, 2011), this Chapter calls for an acknowledgement of the fact that there can be no one-size-fits-all, no universal guidance on dealing with diversity. It therefore supports the idea that more attention needs to be given, both in policies, legislation and educational practice, to subtle,



contextual and intersecting aspects of social diversity, and the ways in which these are constructed as more or less significant and are invested with values. It also calls for a more explicit acknowledgement and addressing of those aspects of diversity that are not easily 'celebrated' in practice.

Finally, locating Greenstone Primary in its wider social, economic and legislative relations has showed that the school does not exist in isolation, but is firmly linked into and organised by wider social relations. In doing so, this Chapter has presented a complex picture of the institutional discourses around difference and diversity in Greenstone Primary which frame the ways in which the children perform their social identities of social class, gender and ethnicity. These ways of performing social identities are discussed in the following two Chapters.

## **Chapter 5: Performing social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity**

In the previous Chapter I have presented and discussed the context of Greenstone Primary, and specifically the complex and ambivalent discourses that construct diversity in particular ways. In doing so, the Chapter has set out the key features of the school setting within which the children of this research perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity.

In this Chapter I explore how the children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity within the context of Greenstone Primary. As discussed in Chapter 3, I am using intersectionality as a sensitising concept in order to investigate the multiple and shifting ways in which social identities are being performed, and draw attention to how particular social identities are foregrounded at different times and in different situations (Valentine, 2007). In doing so, the Chapter also highlights how wider social inequalities become manifest in the children's performing of their social identities.

The Chapter draws on fieldnotes as data and is divided into three sections, which each draw out the salience of social class, gender and ethnicity respectively. Thus, emphasis is placed on social class, gender and ethnicity respectively, and other aspects of social identities are acknowledged as they come into view. I begin each subsection with a particular fieldnote excerpt, which serves to illustrate the salience of the respective identity categories and to draw the reader right into the children's lives in school.

## 5.1 Social class identities

In this section I discuss how the children in this study performed their social class identities. I begin by showing the importance of branded objects and how they are invested with symbolic meanings. I then discuss the ways in which particular practices and choices are endowed with normative values, before exploring the importance of home visits and parental networks for the children's classed relationships.

### 5.1.1 Brands and symbols

Some children in the class have jackets of a certain brand, which generally seems to be popular on the playground. Children point out to each other if they are both wearing one of these jackets and show mutual appreciation. I have looked up the jackets, and they are quite expensive, between £80 and £180.

In our class, Krystle, Eleanor, Tahira and Amy have the jacket.

Eleanor got hers for her birthday a few weeks ago, and she was happily pointing out to everyone to be in partner look with her best friend Krystle.

Tahira had hers first and Amy just got it some days ago. Carla, who is often playing with Tahira and Amy, doesn't have one. She is wearing a rather tattered coat. I know that both Amy and Carla are on free school meals.

Amy is also wearing shiny patent leather shoes that are way too big so she has to walk very strangely in order not to lose them. She is also unable to catch anyone at tag with these shoes, but she accepts that.

When it is time to line up I happen to stand behind Amy. I say: Amy, is that a new coat?

She throws me a long, meaningful look, and without saying a word points at the big brand logo at the front of the jacket, on her chest. I just nod. I have the feeling that she just wanted to point out to me that this was not just any new jacket, it was a branded one.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 March 2012]

This excerpt illustrates the significance of brands for the children's relationships and social status. The branded jackets are invested with symbolic meanings due to their material value, and potentially there is also a gendered intersection with ideas about 'fashionableness' and style. Four girls in the class, along with many other children in the rest of the school, wear a coat of this particular brand. The children who wear the branded coats point them out to each other and create insider-outsider dynamics. The wearing of the coat is not just a 'passive' process, but it is being emphasised and talked about, and thus constitutes a way of *performing* social identities. This reveals a deeply relational component: Eleanor and Krystle are 'best friends' and, on receiving the same coat brand as Krystle for her birthday, Eleanor happily points out this similarity to everyone as an additional aspect over which the two of them bond.

Tahira, Amy and Carla are usually playing together as a group, and now both Tahira and Amy wear the same branded coat. The significance of the brand, which distinguishes the coat from any other jacket, is highlighted in Amy's silent pointing out of the brand logo. Her silence may be interpreted as a lack of words which adequately convey the brand's meaning and value for her, and in the particular situation also gives me a feeling of Amy's deep respect and awe for the value of the brand. I also have the impression that Amy is more conscious of the value of the jacket than other, more privileged children who may take it for granted. By just nodding knowingly I feel as if I am complicit in the construction of the brand's value.

The symbolism of branded clothing for children has been explored in research, although mostly with older children (aged seven and above) (Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Ross and Harradine, 2004; Nairn et al., 2008; Roper and La Niece, 2009; Hamilton, 2012). Elliott and Leonard (2004), for example, describe how wearing

certain brands symbolised powerful stereotypes for children, e.g. perceiving people with preferred brands as successful, 'lucky' and desirable. Children wearing branded clothes were seen as popular and 'fitting in', to the extent that children preferred to talk to children with branded clothes over children with unbranded clothes. For children in poverty, branded clothes have a particular meaning: branded items can be seen as allowing 'symbolic self-completion' for people who perceive themselves as lacking in some way. Therefore, poor families may be 'aware of the absence of money in their life and are using the symbolic meaning of branded goods to fill that gap' (Elliott and Leonard, 2004: 349). This is in line with Hamilton's (2012) findings that low-income parents engage in conspicuous consumption, ensuring that their children have access to the 'right' brands in order to avoid social stigmatization, which may be the case in Amy's situation. Also Ridge (2002), in her study of young people aged 10 to 17, describes how 'looking good' in terms of wearing the right clothes and styles positively contributes to children's self-confidence and relationships.

In Greenstone Primary, clothes and accessories are not only used to construct material and symbolic values, but are also used by some of the girls to perform identities of femininity. It appears that, also in the above case, the coats represent an *intersection* with gendered identities of being feminine, stylish and fashionable. Amy complements her outfit with shiny patent leather shoes which, although limiting her physical movements, earn her much recognition from some of the other girls. Despite repeatedly being told off by the teacher because of their impracticality and the fact that she is excluded from certain games which involve running (because of the over-size of the shoes she loses them), Amy receives many positive comments about them from her peers. On many occasions, I have observed these intersections of social class and gender – brands, styles, fashion – to play an important role in the triad of Tahira, Carla and Amy. Tahira holds a powerful position in this relationship and often pits Carla and Amy against each other by drawing on these categories. For example, in the weeks before Tahira's birthday party, she constantly scrutinises the other girls' demeanour and style and implies that it will influence whether she will give them an invitation or not. In these situations, Amy bonds with Tahira over their

branded jackets and often points out her shiny shoes to her, and it seems that this indeed gains her Tahira's recognition. Amy and Carla, both on free school meals, come from presumably similar social class backgrounds. However, Amy is complying with the 'right' gendered and classed styles and often seems indeed more successful at securing Tahira's favour than Carla.

The coats in the above example are complemented by many other objects in the school context which carry similar high symbolic values, ranging from lunch boxes, school bags and pencil boxes to shoes, clothes and toys smuggled into school. While the emphasis on their material value often carries a classed meaning, such objects (for example Hello Kitty and Star Wars lunch boxes) also serve a strong gendering function, highlighting the intersectional performing of social identities, and the inextricable links between situated identities as both classed and gendered simultaneously.

## **5.1.2 Tastes and values**

On the school playground during the morning break, I join Laura and Eleanor on a wooden bench where they eat their snacks.

Laura has a yogurt in a plastic cup in the shape of a football.

I say: Oh wow, is that a yogurt?

Laura nods and smiles proudly.

Eleanor, sitting next to us, says in a strict tone: Actually that yogurt is not good for children because it doesn't have the good milk in it!

I assume she is right, since the yogurt looks quite cheap – as usual, Laura's snacks consist of ASDA's branded crisps and yogurt. I wonder if Eleanor's parents (who are both doctors, as she often mentions) told her in the supermarket that this wasn't healthy.

Eleanor starts to eat her carrot sticks.

I have the impression that Laura is now eying her yogurt with less enthusiasm.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 17 May 2012]

This excerpt illustrates how classed identities are performed through tastes and values. Laura's yogurt becomes the subject of Eleanor's negative judgement: although with its toy-shaped packaging it is marketed at children (or at boys?), Eleanor deplores it as 'not good for children because it doesn't have the good milk in it'. Presumably she recognises the yogurt as being labelled with a low-budget brand, and draws on differences in perceptions of healthy nutrition and her knowledge on what is 'good for children', which she constructs as superior to Laura's knowledge. Eleanor's choice of words such as 'not good for children' and 'not the good milk' also points to a moral dimension of the interaction. She constructs a particular idea of what constitutes 'good' ingredients and is 'good' for children. Between the lines hangs a suggestion that 'good' children are produced by 'good' yogurt, and that this is why she does not eat this kind of snack and, in fact, appears almost disgusted by it. In many other situations I have witnessed how Eleanor used the professional status of both her parents as doctors in order to substantiate her claims, and thus draws on social discourses of valuable and important professions, who have the power to define what counts as 'good'.

Eleanor's verdict on the yogurt is not limited to its value as an object, but also has relational implications. Not only does she construct herself as 'better' than Laura, but also influences the particular relationships between the three of us in this situation. My positive acknowledgement of the yogurt has given attention to Laura and created a momentary bond between us, and has allowed her to gain positive recognition for the unusual appearance of her snack. By debasing the yogurt, Eleanor also devalues this relationship and dynamic of recognition between Laura and me. Thus, the way in which she performs her social identity in this situation also has implications for our relationships, and could be interpreted as undermining my authority as an adult (who does not even know what constitutes 'good' yogurt).

Although there is no indication in this excerpt of the significance of gender, it is noteworthy that the football-shaped yogurt forms part of the marketing of the impending European football championship which took place in June 2012. In the weeks before the event, football-branded consumerist articles suddenly appeared on children's bags, lunches and accessories, and this particular situation might have taken a different turn if some of the boys in class, who strongly performed their gendered identity through football, would have been part of it. During my fieldwork I noticed that Eleanor tended to perform her gender identity in a particular way, e.g. emphasising her liking of jewellery, hairstyles, princesses, pink and other 'girlie' types of expressions of femininity (Renold, 2005; Konstantoni, 2011). It remains open, therefore, whether she would have judged the value of the yogurt differently had it come, for example, in a princess-shaped packaging.

Laura and Eleanor's exchange also needs to be seen in the context of the significance assigned to food in Greenstone Primary. Although often seen as mundane aspects of everyday life, food practices have been described as significant arenas for performing social identities and relationships (Punch and McIntosh, 2014). In Greenstone Primary, breaks are structured around food (the snack and milk break in the morning, and the lunch break, when all children eat together in the gym hall converted to lunch hall), and children learn about food, eating and cooking in class. Food is an important marker of ethnic differences, for example when teachers use different foods to talk about cultural diversity. Food also has a classed dimension, as discussed on the basis of the 'snack list' practice outlined in section 4.3.5. The 'snack list' has been implemented a few months prior to the above yogurt incident, and although it has not lasted longer than a few weeks, Eleanor's comments can still be interpreted in the light of it. In fact, some of the teacher's comments about children's snacks directly resonate with Eleanor's choice of vocabulary:

Amy has cookies. Ms Brown says: Oh dear Amy, that's the third time this week, oh, dear...not good...

Amy drops her head.

Ms Brown moves on to the next child: Well done Damien, banana is very good!



[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 9 February 2012]

Decisions on what constitutes an appropriate snack, and what counts as ‘healthy’, are dependent on multiple factors, such as parents’ education, cultural backgrounds and financial resources. Amy repeatedly does not meet the healthy snack criteria, and she receives feedback like the above on an almost daily basis. The use of vocabulary suggests that snack choices are invested with a moral value and the children are attributed individual responsibility for them. In this way, the meanings of snacks – at their classed and ethnic intersections – extends beyond the actual food practices and results in social identities, tastes and ways of being becoming invested with particular values.

### **5.1.3 Friendships at home and in school**

In the morning, Krystle, Eleanor, and Laura sit at the writing table and I join them.

Eleanor calls: Marlies, I am going to Krystle’s house today!  
Her mum is going to pick me up and then we go to her house!

Krystle and Eleanor both seem very excited.

I say: How nice, then you can play all afternoon? That sounds like a good start into the weekend.

Eleanor and Krystle say in unison: No, only three and a half hours!

It sounds like they had just been calculating this together.

Eleanor: I have been to Krystle’s house hundreds of times!

Krystle: I have been to your house hundreds of times too!

Eleanor: But I have been to your house more often than you have been at mine.

Laura says in a low voice: I have only been to Eleanor’s house once.

Eleanor: Yes.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 2 December 2011]

Laura, Krystle and Eleanor are the three P2 girls in the class, and thus form a particular triad relationship. However, as noted earlier, Krystle and Eleanor form a pair of 'best friends', and Laura is often excluded from activities that only the two of them pursue. This fieldnote excerpt illustrates how the children's lives at home and in school are interwoven, and how relationships are fostered both within and outwith the school. For the three P2 girls, the day in school begins with a discussion about Eleanor's planned afternoon visit to Krystle's home, to which Laura is not invited. Krystle and Eleanor look forward to the visit in anticipation, and perform the closeness of their relationships by counting, and competing over how many times they have been to each other's homes. I am drawn into the conversation as an audience in front of which they perform their friendship, and indeed I feel obliged to comment positively on it ('how nice'). Compared to the (presumably exaggerated) 'hundreds of times', Laura's 'one time' at Eleanor's house illustrates her position in this triad: Krystle and Eleanor have formed a close relationship, and on many occasions like this one I have observed Laura's struggle to join it.

The excerpt also resonates with many other fieldwork observations which showed the importance of home visits and events such as sleepovers or birthday parties. Being able to invite others to their homes, as well as being invited, increases children's status in the class. Birthday parties, in particular, where the birthday boy/girl invites a limited number of children, bring powerful popularity to those who hand out the invitations. The act of publicly (not)inviting is used by some children to make their relationships, inclusive or exclusive, visible. Reciprocal networks are established, since generally inviting someone to a birthday party guarantees a return invitation, and thus such invitations become a form of 'currency' for friendships.

Parental involvement plays a key role in these processes. Krystle and Eleanor's parents regularly organise mutual home visits, and the girls' conversations indicate a generally friendly relationship between the two families. Often, Krystle and Eleanor's talk indicates classed similarities in terms of their parents' professions,

their extracurricular activities, holiday destinations etc. Laura, on the other hand, spends most afternoons in an afterschool club and her family's rhythm appears quite different. In conversations throughout the fieldwork, Laura has indicated that money is sometimes 'tight' in her household when it comes to presents, clothes or holidays. Her mum has complained to the teacher that she finds it difficult to find the time to do homework with Laura (and there are concerns about Laura's achievements in school, see section 6.3.1), and with two more children and full-time employment she may also struggle to arrange home visits. This ties in with some of the literature on the crucial role of parents' involvement and the relevance of social class. Much of the literature draws attention to parents' organisation of academic 'enrichment activities' (Vincent and Ball, 2007) or processes of 'concerted cultivation' (Lareau, 2003b) and classed differences in these processes. The above examples suggest that also social leisure time with no academic component, such as home visits and play dates, carries fundamental implications in terms of children's classed social relationships in school. Parents, particularly mothers, have been described as socialising agents in children's birthday parties, using rituals and performances to teach children values and general knowledge which are necessary for participation in the ritual of the party (Otnes et al., 1995). Clarke (2007) suggests that mothers subscribe to consumerist practices in order to fulfil normative discourses of 'good' mothering and reach a status of 'sameness' with other mothers when organising such parties. The way in which parents relate outside school is of course dependent on multiple factors, e.g. ethnicity can also play an important role. In the class of this research, for example, a group of American parents formed a strong grouping which influenced their children's relationships in school, as outlined in section 5.3.2.

Children's friendships are complex and not one aspect of social identities and differences can be held responsible for particular groupings and dynamics. Patterson et al. (1992) found that children who face adverse socio-economic circumstances at home are up to ten times more likely to experience rejection or low popularity with their peers in school. In the light of previous examples in this section (e.g. Krystle and Eleanor both wearing one of the 'branded' coats, and Eleanor debasing Laura's cheap yogurt), it appears that social class plays an important role for Laura's

particular experiences of being excluded from Krystle and Eleanor's close relationship. The fact that she is excluded also from the practice of home visits and sleepovers additionally contributes to her status within the group of the P2 girls.

### **5.1.4 Summary**

In this section I have discussed some of the ways in which social class becomes visible in the children's lives at school, and analysed how the children perform their social class identities. Already it became apparent that the performing of social identities and children's relationships cannot easily be reduced to social class alone, but is often also gendered and related to ethnic backgrounds and age.

The section has showed the importance of branded objects and the symbolic meaning that these items carry (e.g. the branded coats). The ways in which children draw attention to, and invest such objects with meanings and values, are deeply relational and have implications for friendship groupings and the children's status within their respective groups. When objects, such as Laura's yogurt, are invested with values and moral connotations, this has an impact on the children's standing and relationships. Although this study was conducted only within the school setting, it has highlighted the importance of relationships beyond school in terms of parents' networking and influence on their children's friendships.

In Chapter 2, I have drawn on authors such as Skeggs (1997) and Weis (2008b) in order to suggest that social class is manifested as cultural practices of living, which are rooted in material and economic inequalities. Such practices may entail, for example, which schools people go to, with whom and with what expectations, if and where people go on holidays, modes of travel, place and nature of housing, etc. (Weis, 2008b). This section has confirmed this conceptualisation of social class as both rooted in economic realities (e.g. owning branded clothing, eating cheap yogurt) and at the same time being performed in the ways children interact and relate to each other, and give meaning to such economic dimensions. By looking at everyday interactions in detail I have showed how the children perform their classed identities

in complex, sometimes subtle and sometimes more pronounced ways, in particular situations.

## 5.2 Gender identities

In this section I discuss how the children in this study perform their gender identities. This involves examples of performing particular forms of femininity and masculinity and competitive and antagonistic dynamics along the construction of a gender binary. It resonates with debates from the literature, reviewed in Chapter 2, on gender and educational achievements, heteronormative gender identities and questions of gendered entitlement and inequalities.

### 5.2.1 Performing gendered relationships

Tuesday morning. The children arrive and hang their coats and bags on the coat rack outside the classroom. Evie and Catherine are having a chat with the headteacher on the corridor. The girls are admiring the headteacher's necklace.

As I walk past them, the headteacher looks at me and says: Oh, we are just having fashion conversations.

We both laugh.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 17 April 2012]

Evie's day at school begins with a gendered interaction. The headteacher at Greenstone Primary presents herself as approachable and friendly, and it is not unusual that she talks to individuals or groups of children in classrooms, in the corridor and on the playground. For most children it seems to be a privilege to be taken seriously and to interact with her, which becomes clear, for example, when children retell their conversations with the headteacher to the rest of the class during carpet time. At the same time, the headteacher's powerful position within the school hierarchy is constantly emphasized and upheld, e.g. 'going to see the headteacher' is used by staff as the ultimate consequence of both good and bad behaviours, serving as both reward *and* punishment.

Thus, Evie and Catherine's conversation with the headteacher in this context is steeped with meanings of gender and authority/power. When the girls praise the headteacher's necklace, they contribute to the general admiration of her person, and at the same time establish a gendered relationship with her. By emphasizing jewellery, they draw on 'girlie' types of femininity (Blaise, 2005; Renold, 2005; Konstantoni, 2011) and by conversing with the headteacher 'from girl to girl' they establish a sense of sameness on the basis of gender, which temporarily outweighs their otherwise different positions in terms of age, power and authority. The headteacher extends the interaction to me and another layer of bonding, this time from 'woman to woman' is established. Her 'we are just having fashion conversations' sounds both trivializing and maybe a bit defensive, as if justifying the topic, as well as at the same time ironically referencing the gender-stereotypical interaction. And indeed, my spontaneous reaction in this situation is to assure her through a complicit laugh (which on an unconscious level may have also been related to the particular power relation between us, since she is one of the main gatekeepers for my study).

Such interactions of girls appealing for recognition for feminine symbols from female adults were indeed quite common during my fieldwork, as illustrated also in the following example:

Asya is wearing a silver sparkly hairband and Ms Brown says: Oh, what a nice sparkly hairband!

A bit later, Catherine comes up to me and says: Did you notice I had this on my skirt?

She points out a small silver heart with glass stones that is attached to her skirt. The teacher hasn't noticed it and dutifully I admire it.

Krystle, standing nearby, now shows me a charm bracelet with many pendants that jingle when she moves, and again I admire it.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 December 2011]

This excerpt is similar to the above interaction between Evie, Catherine and the headteacher, but this time the girls seek recognition from adults for *their* feminine symbols. Both the teacher and I comply with gendered dynamics of valuing the girls' jewellery positively. Sometimes, such as in the case of Asya's hairband, the teacher initiates the compliment. In other situations, such as when Catherine points out her silver heart, I feel strongly implicated to acknowledge it positively. According to Blaise (2005), this dynamic of positively valuing the girls' jewellery can be seen as a chance to celebrate articles associated with the feminine domain. At the same time, it also supports heteronormative practices, since jewellery and fashion have been described as important markers of producing hetero-sexualised identities (Renold, 2005). While jewellery, nail polish, hair bands etc. are used to maintain gender categories (it is often made clear that these articles are not for boys, and boys should not be interested in them), they are sometimes also used to differentiate among the girls' groups by constructing different types of feminised identities.

During the fieldwork, I was only rarely drawn into equivalent conversations (about objects or practices associated with masculinity) by boys. Occasionally, some boys seemed to seek my recognition and approval for what appeared to be stereotypical masculine elements, such as toy swords or Spiderman clothes. The rareness of such interactions could be explained through my own female gender, and the fact that my recognition of 'correct' expressions of masculinity does not have the same weight as recognition coming from a male adult. This is significant given that educational staff at Greenstone Primary are almost exclusively female, and therefore this context can be seen as creating differing opportunities for gendered relationships between the children and staff.

In the above examples, gender is performed as establishing a sense of sameness, but performing gendered relationships often also involved making differentiations within gender-homogeneous groups.

I join Evie and Claire at the creative table and we start to line penne pasta onto a silver thread during the soft start phase, an activity laid out by the teacher.



Claire points out: All the girls have silver!

Evie says: Two girls and a lady.

I say: Am I not a girl?

Claire: No, you're a lady.

I ask: What's the difference?

Claire: You're older. When girls are older they are ladies.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 20 December 2011]

Although there appears to be no specific reason for bringing gender into the conversation, Claire performs gender by pointing out that 'all the girls' have chosen a silver thread. She thereby declares that we are all part of the same group, 'girls'. Evie, however, distinguishes between them (the girls) and me (the lady) and Claire quickly picks up on this distinction and clarifies it further. The designation 'lady' serves to describe my different status in terms of age (as explicitly referenced by Claire), but also has a social class connotation which may indicate our different positions in terms of power. The example shows how performing gender thus also intersects with other dimensions of social identity.

While, as in the above examples, gender identities are constructed, and sometimes challenged, along the intersections with other social identity categories, it appeared to be very important for children to be able to do gender 'correctly' (Davies, 2003). The following is an example of this 'correct' way of performing gender – in this case a particular expression of femininity – by adhering to dominant discourses:

Brenda and Catherine are colouring in a church (as part of an exercise in which they have to identify objects beginning with the letter 'c') when Brenda says: I know it is a church but I make it a fairy castle.

Catherine says: Me too!

Brenda: I make it purple 'cause that's a fairy colour!

Catherine: Yes, purple and pink and gold!

Brenda: Just like girls' colours. Lots of girls like these colours.

I say: Yes, that's something I always wondered. Why do you think it is that girls like these colours?

Catherine: 'Cause they're just girls' colours!

She looks as if she thinks I am a bit stupid.

Brenda: And in the books the fairies are always pink and purple!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 23 February 2012]

Brenda invests the exercise with a new meaning by adding a gendered dimension to it (turning the church into a fairy castle). She makes it clear that she deliberately changes its meaning ('I know it is a church but...'), possibly in order to personalize it and thus make it more relevant and entertaining. The conversation may also reflect an intersection of gender and consumerist practices, since fairies and fairy castles are heavily marketed at girls (fairies are indeed very prominent on girls' accessories in the class, e.g. key rings and pencil cases). There is a clear agreement between the girls on what constitute 'girls' colours', and, alluding to 'the books', they quickly reference popular discourses of femininity to justify this. However, despite demonstrating her gender knowledge of 'girls' colours' in the above excerpt, Brenda has showed on other occasions that she knows that such gender binaries are socially constructed and not fixed:

During maths, the children have to colour in different shapes on the promethean board in front of the whole class. It is Joshua's turn. He has to identify all the triangles and colour them in pink. Ms Brown hands him the pen. The boys giggle.

Brenda shouts out: Boys can like pink too!

Patrick says: Nooo!

Some other boys loudly agree with him.

Ms Brown says: But Patrick, *you* like pink, whenever you have to choose a piece of paper and I have a pink one you always choose the pink one.

Patrick denies it, blushes and looks like he would like to disappear.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 5 December 2011]

The boys' giggling ridicules Joshua, who is forced by Ms Brown to use a colour associated with femininity. In addition to debasing Joshua, the giggling also implies a negative connotation of constructions of femininity. Brenda's argument, that it is valid for boys to like pink, therefore can be seen as both an argument for more fluid gender categories as well as a defence of the feminine domain (along the lines of, it is OK to like pink) (Blaise, 2005). Also the teacher attempts to deconstruct pink as a girls' colour by confronting Patrick (who on other occasions I have observed to be one of the boys with particularly hegemonic masculine behaviour, i.e. strong, rough, loud, rude (cf. Konstantoni, 2011)) with his liking of pink. However, this seems ineffective, since Patrick appears to perceive this as humiliation or as a threat to his masculinity rather than as an acceptable alternative to it. This indicates the importance of being positioned 'correctly' in relation to gender by others. Patrick may on other occasions indeed have chosen 'pink pieces of paper' because he decided it to be appropriate and acceptable in these specific situations. However, being now positioned near the feminised 'pink' disempowers him of choosing his style of performing masculinity in this particular situation.

The examples in this section have given some insights into how prevalent processes of performing gender are in the school context, and how they permeate the everyday interactions of children and staff. Relationships are constructed and defined through performing gender, and the children constantly navigate a balance between performing and challenging particular expressions of gender identities, and of femininity and masculinity. However, these dynamics are also highly dependent on the specific context, and the people involved. The children's agency of deciding *how* to perform their gender identities is thus highly contextual. Patrick may have chosen 'pink sheets of paper' on some occasions, but presumably this was in contexts in which he was not scrutinized for his way of performing masculinity by others and therefore it may have been perceived as positive or acceptable. Also dynamics of power are of crucial importance: it makes a big difference whether someone decides

to challenge gender stereotypes (such as Brenda in the above excerpt), or whether someone's gender identity is challenged by others (such as Ms Brown challenging Patrick). This indicates the significance of relational dynamics in gender identities, and highlights complex interdependencies (Konstantoni, 2012) as well as the importance of context (Valentine, 2011) for dynamics of agency and power.

### 5.2.2 Powerful gender binaries

I sit with Joshua, Umar, Claire, Evie and Catherine at the drawing table, and everyone is busy with their drawings.

Evie goes and gets a rubber from the nearby rubber drawer. Joshua needs a rubber as well and gets one for himself. Joshua's rubber is only half the size of Evie's, but they seem to both do their job equally well.

Evie takes both rubbers, looks at them in her hands, then hands the big one to Joshua and says to me and Catherine and Claire: We got the small one because boys are better than girls!

I am shocked and have to hold back that I don't protest (or maybe I should have!), and I think Joshua and Umar both look a bit surprised.

There was no 'gender talk' at this table before, and the statement comes as a surprise to me.

Evie repeats laughingly: Boys are better than girls!

She says it smilingly, as if she was happy to accept that, in fact as if she had said something that everyone knows anyway.

Catherine and Claire just continue with their work sheets, and don't say anything.

I say to Evie: Do you really think that?

Evie: Yes!

The boys don't say anything.

Now Catherine says: Marlies, it's true, my little sister likes boys better, even if it's just a joke, she still has more boys as friends.

Evie throws in: And in my nursery there was a bunch of boys and they were sooo good, they were just like adults!

I think I look surprised now and I have already given away in my tone and attitude that I don't agree with Evie's statement, so it seems they feel they need to explain it to me now.

Now Claire joins in and says to me: Yes, boys are better 'cause once I tried to open something and I couldn't and the boy could!

I feel now I have to say something, I can hardly leave that in the room like this. But I don't know quite what to say, where to start.

I say: But don't you think that boys and girls are both equally good, girls are just as good as boys..?

Catherine now looks approvingly: Yes, that's true.

Evie and Claire look doubtful, but don't say anything.

Joshua and Umar have not said anything.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 23 April 2012]

This excerpt can be seen as a powerful illustration of Connell's (1995) concepts of hegemonic masculinities and emphasized femininities, as the culturally dominant forms and patterns of masculinity and femininity. Evie swaps her bigger rubber with Joshua's smaller rubber since according to her 'boys are better than girls' and therefore he is entitled to it. She actively *does* gender in this situation, creating a binary of 'us', the girls (into which she includes me), and 'them', the boys, and ascribing the two categories different values. Her statement does not cause any reaction from the other girls and boys at the table, which suggests that it is not seen as a remarkable or contentious announcement. Only when I question Evie's expression do she and the other girls justify the boys' supposed superiority, drawing on discourses of hegemonic masculinity: (physical) strength, competence and power. Both masculinity and adulthood are constructed as attractive categories ('the boys were so good, just like adults'), and the statement hints at desirable qualities

produced by the adult/male intersection, such as maturity, competence or rationality. Only Catherine seems to be slightly ambivalent about the supposed male superiority, as she agrees with me that boys and girls are 'equally good'. She also questions whether her little sister really 'likes boys better', indicating that it might 'just be a joke', although it is not quite clear what this statement means. The girls, in this situation, perform what Connell (2005) terms *emphasized femininity*, defined 'around the compliance with subordination and oriented around accommodating the interests and desires of men' (Blaise, 2005: 21). This illustrates again the relationality of performing gender, as Evie constructs femininity in relation to hegemonic masculinity, even without the boys' active involvement in the exchange. The girls are accepting, internalizing and re-constructing a particular social gender order and the boys' silence in the conversation can be interpreted as a tacit agreement.

The blatant, uncritically accepted gender inequality in this scenario – initiated and defended by the girls themselves – took me by surprise as a researcher. This is evident in my clumsy 'challenging' of the gender order established in this situation, which does not seem to sway Evie and Claire from their opinion. The incident left me feeling unsatisfied and uncomfortable about my own reaction. In retrospect, however, I doubt to what extent a different 'intervention' on my part would have been able to deconstruct the children's powerful internalised gender hierarchy. Significant gender inequalities that mainly disadvantage women in a range of social and economic areas persist in Scotland and internationally (Breitenbach and Wasoff, 2007), and, in this context, the girls' ways of performing gender can be interpreted as having learned how to do gender 'correctly' according to dominant social discourses and inequalities. By emphasising the boys' superiority in terms of competence, and their resulting superior entitlement (in this case, to the bigger rubber), the girls *openly* perform a form of gender discrimination that persists in our society, although its existence is sometimes questioned and often remains unaddressed. The situation can therefore be seen as an example of how gender inequalities become manifest in the children's performing of their social identities, and how performing their social identities in this way contributes to the persistence of such inequalities.

The above excerpt also illustrates how the children's gender work is socially constructed – a supposedly gender-‘neutral’ object like the rubber can be used to construct gender identities and values. This construction of a gender binary of ‘*the girls*’ and ‘*the boys*’ was a dynamic that I repeatedly observed during my fieldwork. Although these groups are far from being homogeneous, and within them I observed different ways of negotiating masculinity and femininity (such as ‘softer’ boys or ‘tomboyish’ girls) as described in a growing body of literature (Thorne, 1993; Connell, 1995; MacNaughton, 2000; Renold, 2004; 2005; Blaise, 2005; Reay, 2006a; Konstantoni, 2011), the binary between girls and boys was constructed continuously by both children and staff. For staff, this consisted of dividing groups by gender, and ascribing characteristics to gendered groups (as in the examples discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.3.4.2). Thus, staff's interactions were sometimes constructing ways of being a girl or a boy in rather stereotypical ways, and often contributed to emphasising the gender binary.

By the children, the gender binary was invoked both through gender-separate playing groups and friendship dyads and triads, as well as in gender-mixed play. This latter dynamic, in which mixed gender groups *do* interact, but in and through their interactions construct gender differences, has been described as ‘borderwork’ (Thorne, 1993: 64). The result is a heightened awareness of gender in these interactions. Blaise (2005) described examples of this kind of borderwork in cross-gender interactions, such as when girls take on the gender-stereotypical roles of housewives, mothers or nurses, and boys the roles of policemen or adventurers. This kind of borderwork according to societal gender norms was something I could only rarely observe in my fieldwork, and then generally in more abstract terms (e.g. some girls tending to advocate peaceful behaviour as opposed to some boys favouring pretend-play conflicts). This could be explained through the fact that, significantly, everyday life in school rarely allows time for extended role play or pretend-play, and if playing in gender-mixed groups on the playground the children favoured games like tag or hide-and-seek which have fewer opportunities for creating gender-stereotypical roles.

Borderwork in cross-gender interactions often involved girl and boy groups taking antagonistic or competitive stances towards each other, both in games on the playground as well as in interactions in the classroom:

Krystle, Laura, Aamil, Patrick and Eleanor are sitting at the creative table and making paper dragons.

Krystle says to Laura, out of the blue: Laura, is your dragon a boy or a girl?

Laura shouts confidently: A girl!

Patrick grumbles: Of course, Laura always makes everything a girl.

Laura giggles and starts to sing: Girls come first, boys come second, babies come third!

Patrick snorts disdainfully.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 26 January 2012]

The children engaged in this conversation are the P2 group within the composite class. While engaging in a 'gender-neutral' activity, Krystle prompts Laura to ascribe her paper dragon a gender. Laura (apparently not for the first time), 'makes her dragon a girl' and takes this as an opportunity to construct the superiority of girls. In light of Laura's particular status in this group (e.g. she has difficulties in keeping up with academic achievements of the P2 group, and is often excluded from the P2 girls group) her emphasis on gender could also be interpreted as trying to establish a bond with Krystle and Eleanor over their shared gender identities, which she contrasts sharply with the boys' gender identities. The slogan of 'girls come first, boys come second!' (or vice versa) was often used by the children in games on the playground, usually initiated by one and then chanted by groups of children in antagonistic gender borderwork. In this case, Laura also adds 'babies' as a third, and seemingly gender-neutral category, which suggests that her ranking is based on ideas of competence and independence in relation to gender *and* age.

An explanation for the prevalence of this kind of antagonistic behaviour of cross-gender groups may be the performance-oriented nature of the school context,



especially with regards to different gender-related constructions of boys and girls as learners and achievers in school (e.g. Renold, 2001a; 2001b) which, as showed in Chapter 4, is also fostered by staff. The following excerpt illustrates how achievement and competence in relation to school work is heavily intertwined with gendered identities:

Gabriel and Leo are sitting at the round table doing an activity and I join them. They have to identify words that rhyme.

Tahira sits down next to us and starts with the exercise. She asks me: Marlies, does bat rhyme with cat?

I say: Yes.

Now Gabriel shouts, tauntingly: Tahira doesn't know it!

Tahira ignores him, and I have the impression that Gabriel was also more speaking to me.

I say: Yes she did, didn't she? She just asked me if it was correct!

Gabriel: No, Tahira doesn't know it, and Asya and Carla they don't know it!

(Asya and Carla were doing the same exercise just shortly before).

Tahira still doesn't say anything, just continues her exercise.

Gabriel, and now also Leo shout: Marlies helped her! You helped her! *We* know it all by ourselves!

Their tone is cheeky – not angry, and Tahira doesn't seem upset. They are all laughing.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 15 March 2012]

In this situation, Tahira decides to join an activity group with Gabriel, Leo and me. As soon as she sits down, she begins a conversation by asking me whether 'bat rhymes with cat'. Her question could mean that she seeks clarification as to whether she is doing the exercise correctly. She may also be seeking my approval and praise, rather than my help with finding the correct answer, since she appears to already

know it. The question could also just be a communication tool to begin a conversation with me. However, Gabriel quickly picks up on the interaction by constructing Tahira as unable to do the exercise. The accusation comes after what is implied to have been a similar situation with two other girls, Asya and Carla, at the same table previously. Gabriel and Leo thus construct a gender binary of 'we' (the boys) and 'them', the girls, drawing on ideas of male independence, autonomy and competence (as elements of hegemonic masculinity), as opposed to girls' being incompetent and needing help.

The exchange can be located against the background of discourses of gendered achievement, in terms of boys' underachievement and disaffection with schooling, which have been increasingly discussed in both popular media and research (e.g. Raphael Reed, 2006; Reay, 2003). Such discourses were observable also in my fieldwork, in terms of girls seeking more interactions with (the predominantly female) staff, and often being constructed as more compliant and well-behaved. Gabriel and Leo's reaction can thus be interpreted as a form of protest against their particular positioning in relation to gendered achievement. In fact, they directly reference that 'girls need help' from adults (in this case, me), and therefore they are less competent. They, on the other hand, 'know it all by themselves', but seem to feel that they need to point this out in order to construct themselves as equally, and in fact even more, competent.

Summing up, this section has showed the prevalence of gender identities as opposite binaries, which construct girls and boys as homogenised, distinct groups and attribute them particular characteristics. The section as also showed that the gender binary, and values ascribed to groups of boys and girls, are not happening in isolation, but are rooted in and shaped by discourses of gender differences in schooling, and wider gender inequalities in society. Both amicable as well as competitive and antagonistic gender borderwork was showed to be often shaped by ideas of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. These ideas are linked to heteronormative assumptions about gender identities, which are discussed in the following section.

### 5.2.3 Heteronormative gender relations

I join Joshua, Umar, Amy, Evie and Catherine who are reading a story about hippos.

Evie says: I don't like the book!

Amy says she doesn't like it either. Joshua likes it, Catherine and Umar don't say anything.

Joshua asks Evie why she doesn't like it.

Evie: 'Cause it's got the boy...

She falls silent and appears to be thinking.

Amy shouts: I don't like the boy character!

Joshua, to Evie: What, you don't like boys? But you still like hippos?

Meaning, she can still like the book?

Amy: I don't like boy characters!

Evie defends herself: It's not the boy, only, it's just the book...

She seems to find it difficult to pin down why she doesn't like the book, but apparently not because of the boy character.

Joshua interrupts her and asks: Do you like Chip? [a boy character in the children's reading book series]

Evie: Yes.

Joshua: Do you like Kipper? [another boy character]

Evie: Yes.

Joshua: Do you like dad? [in the reading books]

Evie: Yes.

Joshua: They're all boy characters. So you DO like boy characters!

Evie: Yes I know, it's just...

Now Catherine says to Evie, in a serious tone: Evie, at some point you're gonna fall in love with a boy anyway.

Amy giggles, but the others remain serious.

Evie replies, seriously: I know I will at some point, but I still don't like this book, it's so...

She can't say what it is that bothers her about the book and they eventually move on to a different topic.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 13 March 2012]

As often, when children are reading books together, they share and discuss their opinions of the storyline and characters. Evie expresses a disliking of the book, and her initial statement (''cause it's got the boy...') is interpreted by the group as if her dislike was explained through the fact that the book has a male central character. Before she can explain it further, Amy picks up on the gender of the character and announces that she does not like this boy character, as well as boy characters in general. Although Amy is relatively ignored by the others, her intervention gives the conversation a clear gender turn. However, her statements are playful and through her giggling she gives them a 'silly' connotation, which may explain why the others ignore her – as they are keen to have a serious discussion about gender identities and relationships. Evie tries to rectify her statement that the boy is the cause for her disapproval of the book ('it's not the boy, only, it's the book...') but Joshua has already picked up on the gender focus and tries to convince Evie that she *does* like boys (although she never claimed the opposite). His series of questions seems to be used as a rhetorical device to make his argument, in the interrogation style of a lawyer proving a point in front of a jury. Finally, Catherine intervenes by declaring that Evie will 'at some point fall in love with a boy anyway'. Evie accepts the inevitability of this statement for the future, but still reserves her right not to like the book, for whatever reason, in this moment.

It does not become clear from the dialogue to what extent the gender of the character is actually causing Evie's dislike of the book. However, the excerpt illustrates how gender relationships are actively constructed and discussed by the children. In this

case, the choice seems to be between antagonistic (girls and boys do not like each other) and heterosexual (girls and boys inevitably fall in love) relations. Age is a key factor in mediating these two extremes, since ‘at some point’ in the (adult?) future – as opposed to the present – romantic relationships between men and women are unavoidable. Thus, the children also draw on social discourses of childhood as a state of (sexual) innocence, which will inevitably be corrupted through the process of growing up (cf: James and Prout, 1997).

The excerpt serves as a powerful illustration of Butler’s heterosexual matrix as a way of thinking about children’s normative gender identities (cf. Renold, 2005). As outlined in Chapter 2, Butler (1990: 151) claims that oppositional and hierarchical gender identities are defined through the ‘compulsory practice of heterosexuality’. For Evie and Catherine, the ‘proper’ and only possible way of growing up is to desire the opposite sex, and the way in which girls and boys are to relate to each other is shaped through the heterosexual matrix. They thus perform gender in a heteronormative way and although their conversation hints at an idea of heterosexual ‘becomings’, rather than ‘beings’ (they will fall in love with the opposite sex at some point, not *now*); heteronormative discourses are still very present in the children’s everyday lives. However, especially in discourses about young children, sexuality is often rendered invisible, which can lead to heteronormative gender identities going unquestioned by children and staff (Robinson, 2005). During my fieldwork, I have observed examples of this ‘silencing’ of children’s sexuality and heteronormative practices. Physical contact across gender groups, for example, is discouraged at Greenstone Primary: girls are only allowed to tickle girls, and boys are only allowed to tickle boys. Although it is common for children to ‘fancy’ someone, write love letters, play ‘getting married’ or have a boyfriend/ girlfriend, these practices are reduced to ‘silliness’ by staff and often explicitly banned. As a consequence, they are displaced into a subculture hidden from educational staff, to which I was occasionally granted access (for example, when being invited to a wedding on the playground).

In this section I have sought to show how, in many situations, doing gender also means doing sexuality: both gender and sexuality are inherently fragile but at the

same time compulsory in their nature, and their performance depends on the contrasting presence of an ‘other’ (Renold, 2005: 8). Although the heterosexual matrix regulates children’s ways of performing gender, this can be done in a multiplicity of ways. It can be noticed that in the above excerpt, Umar remains silent. Indeed, I often observed that mainly white British, American or European children participated actively in certain types of heteronormative gender performing (e.g. in relation to having a boyfriend or girlfriend). Thus, ethnicity may form an important intersection with heteronormative ways of performing gender. Along with the importance of age in relation to discourses about sexuality, this section thus points towards the highly intersectional nature of children’s gendered identities.

### **5.2.4 Summary**

The examples of children performing their gender identities discussed in this section have given insights into the significance of gender in the primary school. Gendered interactions permeate most aspects of children’s everyday lives in school, and gender identities are performed in relationships – whether antagonistic, in competition, and by ascribing or challenging others’ performing of gender. These relationships do not only involve peers, but also staff at Greenstone Primary, as well as myself as the researcher.

The analysis of these examples echoes theories discussed in Chapter 2 which view gender as socially constructed (Thorne, 1993) and relational (MacNaughton, 2000; 2006). Thus, gender is not something that the children have, but something they *do* (and continuously re-do) through everyday social and cultural practices. This means that there are multiple ways in which gender can be performed, for example in relation to different expressions of femininity and masculinity. Gender identities also vary along the intersections with other categories, e.g. age, social class, consumerist practices, or ethnicity, as illustrated in this section.

The multiple and varying ways of performing different femininities and masculinities raise questions about children’s agency in deciding when and how to perform their

gender identities in particular ways. Rather than conceptualising this agency as 'intentional' (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008), I have showed that it is highly contextual and relational (Valentine, 2011; Oswell, 2013).

It became also clear that the children's ways of performing their gender identities are highly influenced by wider social discourses. Heteronormative ideas, for example, are powerfully reflected in the performing of oppositional, heterosexual gender identities. Gender inequalities were made manifest in gender identities which constructed boys as superior in terms of power and questions of entitlement.

## 5.3 Ethnic identities

This section explores different ways in which the children performed their ethnic identities in Greenstone Primary. I begin by exploring the different dimensions of ethnicity which have been constructed as salient by different children. I then discuss how ethnicity was performed in friendships, for example by either playing down or emphasising ethnic differences. Finally, I discuss how ethnic identities are performed at the complex intersections between school and home lives.

### 5.3.1 Salient dimensions of ethnicity

In the morning, during soft start, I sit at the play dough table and Raphael, Leo and Joshua join me.

The class is preparing for Chinese New Year's celebration, and many of the current exercises in class are Chinese-themed. At the play dough table, children have to shape play dough into the form Chinese letter signs, dragons or chopsticks.

Raphael hasn't been at school for a few days after the Christmas break and I ask: Have you been on holiday?

He says: In Hong Kong!

I say: Ohhh, nice.

We continue working with the play dough in silence for a minute. Then Raphael points at the Chinese letter signs on the play dough exercises and says: I can read these.

I say: Really? That's pretty cool.

Raphael: Yes, 'cause I'm Chinese.

Joshua says: Sometimes I eat Chinese.

I ask Raphael: Do you also speak Chinese at home?

Raphael: Yes.... Sometimes.



Then the boys start mocking me about the way I form play  
dough chopsticks and laugh.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 20 January 2012]

Raphael is the only Chinese boy in the class, and one of only few Chinese children in the whole school. He has missed a few days at school because he was on an extended family holiday in his country of origin. On returning to school, he does not mention his holiday. Only when I ask him in the above situation, he declares that he has been in Hong Kong, without elaborating further. However, a moment later he points out that he can read Chinese letter signs, because he is Chinese. The conversation serves as an example of how Raphael performs his ethnic identity within the particular context of the institutional discourse of celebrating diversity in Greenstone Primary. Staff make continuous efforts to highlight and acclaim cultural diversity, and Chinese New Year is one of the main cultural events in the school year. In this situation, he performs his ethnic identity by drawing on his country of origin, language/writing and culture-specific knowledge. Joshua associates food as another dimension of Chinese ethnicity, and stresses that he sometimes shares this particular practice. This may be in order to emphasise his friendship with Raphael, and his positive valuing of Chinese culture, or maybe also in order to demonstrate *his* knowledge about what being Chinese means. Joshua's statement also indicates that, despite their differing ethnic backgrounds, there are intersections between his and Raphael's everyday lives.

It is quite common that children and their families travel long distances to their countries of origin, and are therefore absent on school days before or after school holidays. On some occasions, parents have mentioned cheaper airfares as a reason for booking flights outwith the holiday dates. The fact that children miss school days as a result is sometimes frowned upon by the teachers, and this is somewhat in contrast with the celebratory discourse around diversity: it may be interpreted as 'diversity' being only approved as long as it does not interfere with school values. This might be a reason why Raphael has not mentioned his trip to Hong Kong on his own accord, but only when asked by me. My explicit approval ('ohhh nice'), along

with the Chinese-themed exercises which celebrate Chinese ethnicity, may have prompted him to further disclose aspects of his Chinese identity.

The conversation between Raphael and Joshua is an example of how ethnicity, in this case ‘being Chinese’, is constructed through a number of different markers – language, country of origin, food etc. – which have different salience for different children in different contexts. This makes the construction of ethnic identities a fluid, contextual and relational process. Markers of ethnicity are used to define the self (‘I can read Chinese signs because I am Chinese’) which automatically contains a reference to others (those who cannot read the signs are not Chinese). Additional markers which were used to delineate ethnic identities by the children in P1/2 at Greenstone Primary were religion, nationality, cultural celebrations, and, very rarely, skin colour. Raphael generally does not often refer to his Chinese identity, unless pointed to do so in a conversation like the above. Other children draw on ethnic markers to perform their ethnic identities more often and explicitly.

There are a few Pakistani children in the class, and generally in Greenstone Primary this is one of the biggest ethnic groups. However, within this group, children perform their ethnic identities in different ways, and mostly refer to their ethnic identities as ‘being Urdu’. ‘Being Urdu’ is used to describe a number of dimensions of ethnicity. It can be used to delineate language:

In the lunch hall, Aamil shouts: Hands up if you speak Urdu!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 21 December 2011]

In other contexts, ‘being Urdu’ may refer to nationality or country of origin:

Fatima: I am going to Pakistan ‘cause I’m Urdu!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 15 March 2012]

In this case, Fatima establishes a connection between ‘being Urdu’ and ‘being Pakistani’. However, Urdu is also an official language in some Indian states, and spoken in many other countries, and therefore ‘being Urdu’ may not always equal

‘being Pakistani’. ‘Being Urdu’ was also used by children to refer to religious elements of ethnicity:

Tahira is invited to a birthday party at Brenda’s place. She says: Brenda, tell your mum I am going to have cheese and bread! I want cheese and bread, ‘cause I don’t like your food!

Brenda: There’s gonna be cheese sandwiches, do you want them?

Tahira: Yes, cheese sandwiches are good!

I know it is a BBQ party, so I ask Tahira: Do you not like to eat meat?

Tahira: No, ‘cause I’m Urdu!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 26 April 2012]

Here, food is constructed as a marker of ethnic groups by Tahira (‘I don’t like *your* food’). However, on my enquiry, it appears that food also marks religion<sup>31</sup>, and therefore in this case ‘being Urdu’ constitutes both cultural as well as religious dimensions of ethnicity. These examples of operationalising ‘being Urdu’ in various ways illustrate how ethnicity is constructed by drawing on multiple dimensions, which are given different importance by different children. In the above examples, ‘being Urdu’ is stressed in order to mark some kind of difference, but sometimes children also perform their ethnic identities in less explicit ways. An example is Asya, whose family emigrated from Turkey, but staff are unsure about Asya’s native tongue, and, it appears, so is she:

Recently, Ms Brown encourages the children to say ‘good morning’ in their mother tongue or any other language they know, when she does the register. It has been a few days now that Asya says ‘good morning’ in a language that nobody knows, and again today.

Ms Brown: What language is that Asya?

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<sup>31</sup> The language of Urdu is historically associated with the religion of Islam, and, according to the Quran, Muslims only eat meat that is ‘Halal’ and do not eat pork.

Asya: I don't know.

Some of the other children try to help and shout: It's French!  
It's Spanish!

Asya looks confused.

Ms Brown: No it's not. Oh dear, Asya, we need to find out  
what language that is you're talking!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 21 February 2012]

Asya never indicates her country of origin or native tongue, which may be part of a strategy of 'fitting into' the norm of speaking English, stressing her sameness rather than difference. However, she decides to use a different language on this occasion, although it is actually not clear whether it is her mother tongue, or any other language in which she may know how to say 'good morning'. The very fact that she is unable to *name* her language, may, of course, be a language issue. It could also be an indication that language, or other dimensions of ethnicity, do in fact not have a big significance for Asya, or that on the other hand, she would rather not disclose what language she is speaking. However, her unknown language status causes some discontent in the group, with other children trying to suggest a language label, and the teacher's 'oh dear' indicating an unpleasantness of this uncertainty. While Asya persists with her foreign language greeting for a few mornings, she then returns to using English, and the mystery remains unsolved.

In line with the celebratory discourse around diversity, as outlined in Chapter 4, the above examples of performing ethnicity draw on particular dimensions of it, namely language, cultural knowledge, food, religion, and countries of origin. Physical markers of ethnicity are, in fact, absent from this discourse, and – perhaps as a consequence – also did not feature significantly in my fieldwork observations. Research with younger children has showed their awareness of physical characteristics, such as skin colour, hair colour or facial characteristics, and the importance of these markers for constructing ethnic boundaries, similarities or differences (Connolly, 1998; Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001; Devine and Kelly, 2006; Konstantoni, 2011). While physical differences were generally not used by the children to perform their own ethnic identities, the following excerpt shows that the

children in this study were indeed aware of such markers and their social consequences:

Catherine and Brenda are doing an exercise at the maths table: There is a big poster of a bus, and 20 cards depicting different people who can be attached to the bus seats. It is obviously quite an old learning resource, 1980s style. The 20 people are all adults and are drawn as different ages (from middle-aged to grandparents), men and women, and different ethnicities: about six Black people, four Asian-looking people and the rest are white. The exercise requires children to put certain numbers of people on the bus and count them.

Brenda says: Let's sit them down how they live together!

Catherine: You mean by men and women?

Brenda thinks for a moment: No, by skin colour.

Catherine starts putting all the Black people in the front of the bus. Within the group of Black people, she also pairs men and women that look like they could be a couple in terms of their age. She has five Black people, and therefore one is not in a couple.

She says to Brenda: We need another Black!

Although I have been observing them already, now I turn more attentively to them and ask: What are you doing?

Brenda says: We're putting the light ones here (points at the back end of the bus) and the dark ones here (points at the front end of the bus).

Brenda takes an Asian couple and puts them on the side: We are putting them here for now. (Is she unsure about where to put them?)

Catherine is still looking for a sixth Black person to fill up her couples: We need another dark one!

Then they get interrupted by the teacher who calls them to another exercise.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 21 February 2012]

In this situation, Brenda and Catherine invest the exercise with an additional, 'real life' meaning by arranging the people on the bus 'how they live together'. This

requires them to identify and prioritise identity categories that they deem significant for social groups: in this case, ethnicity, gender and age. While Catherine suggests heteronormative gender relations as the primary marker for social groupings ('by men and women'), Brenda takes the lead and gives priority to 'skin colour'. However, within groups of the same skin colour, she then also arranges people as heterosexual couples of similar ages. It is noticeable that Brenda and Catherine use the term 'Black' among each other, and only when I enter the conversation, revert to the terms 'dark' and 'light'.

In this excerpt, Brenda and Catherine construct skin colour as a salient marker of what distinguishes social groups in society. This emphasis on physical characteristics was something that I only rarely observed in my fieldwork. I never witnessed any interactions between children in which they pointed out physical differences of each other (which does not mean that this never happened). Research with younger children has showed their awareness of physical differences, and has indeed been criticized for focussing predominantly on physical characteristics (Connolly, 2003). Indeed, the children in this study occasionally pointed out physical differences in books or media, such in this case in the bus learning resource, but never physical differences of their own bodies. So, while the children clearly were not 'colour-blind', they decided not to use skin colour and other physical markers in performing their own ethnic identities.

This could be explained through a number of reasons. Quite likely, children were aware of the social 'taboo' of distinguishing and discriminating on the basis of skin colour. The fact that Catherine and Brenda changed their terminology for skin colour after my intervention in the conversation, from 'Black' to the more ambiguous 'light and dark', may hint at the fact that they are aware of discriminatory meanings of language and are trying to use 'correct' language in relation to 'race'. In addition, children's constructions of ethnicity need to be located within the celebratory discourse around diversity at Greenstone Primary. As outlined in Chapter 4, this discourse only emphasises certain dimensions of ethnicity – e.g. language, food, customs – and excludes any physical characteristics. Thus, implicitly, it downplays the importance of physical markers, or may also be interpreted as tabooing the very

notion of physical differences. While staff at Greenstone Primary acknowledge inequalities within their school roll to some extent, the overarching discourse is to pretend that such inequalities do not exist. Stoll (2014) describes this as a ‘colour-blind’ practice, by which teachers think inequalities are best addressed by pretending that they do not exist. However, such an attitude suggests that inequalities are perceived as existing only on an individual level (e.g. racist interactions between pupils), and neglects the systemic dimensions of inequalities (i.e. racial inequalities in society). These systemic dimensions are illustrated in the particular ‘bus’ maths resource. Brenda and Catherine segregate people on the bus by ethnicity, heteronormative gender relations and age; and the fact that this practice of pairing works out suggests that the learning resource may have been designed with this ordering of people in mind (an equal number of men, women, different ethnicities and age groups). Thus, while emphasising cultural differences, the resource does not challenge the homogeneity of cultural groups, and therefore reinforces ideas of ethnic segregation.

This section has showed how children perform their social identities by drawing on a number of dimensions of ethnicity. The ways in which certain dimensions of ethnicity are constructed as salient differ depending on the context and children involved. The ways in which the children perform their ethnic identities in Greenstone Primary are located against the background of the ethnically highly diverse school population and the continuous efforts of staff to highlight and celebrate certain aspects of cultural diversity, and muting other aspects of diversity. This makes the performing of ethnicity a complex, multifaceted and shifting process.

### **5.3.2 Ethnicity and friendships**

During lunch time, Raphael, Leo and Gabriel sit next to each other. Leo (whose parents are German) and Gabriel (whose parents are Polish) are close friends and if possible always work and play together. Raphael joins them whenever possible; they seem to be his best friends in class.

Gabriel and Leo both have a sandwich for lunch. Raphael has Chinese food, as usual. Leo and Gabriel compare their sandwiches and what they have as fillings.

Raphael and Leo both have a Star Wars branded lunch box. Raphael points at them and says: Look, Star Wars!

There is a name tag on Raphael's lunch box, saying 'Raphael' and something in Chinese writing. It looks as if it might be a label with Raphael's Chinese name.

Leo asks him: Is that Chinese?

Raphael: Yes!

Leo: What does it say?

Raphael: I don't know!

He quickly turns the lunch box so the writing is not in view anymore.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 March 2012]

This excerpt illustrates that navigating complex friendship groups of dyads and triads is not just a female domain (such as between Tahira, Carla and Amy, or between Krystle, Eleanor and Laura illustrated earlier). In my fieldwork observations, it appeared that Leo and Gabriel were very close friends, and if situations (e.g. games or exercises) required children to form pairs, they usually joined together. Raphael did not have such an obvious 'best friend' in class, and spent most of his time with Gabriel and Leo. Although Gabriel and Leo were always welcoming him into the group and seemed to enjoy his company, it appeared that the link between the two of them was 'stronger' than between them and him. Although Leo and Gabriel's families have immigrated from different countries, and they have different mother tongues, their families possibly share some cultural experiences due to being white Europeans in Scotland. In this context, the above situation can be interpreted as Raphael downplaying markers of his Chinese identity (food and Chinese letters), while at the same time emphasising the Star Wars branded lunch boxes as a similarity between him and Leo (and Star Wars was often also associated with particular expressions of masculinity, as discussed below). His denial of any



knowledge of Chinese letter signs is in contrast to other situations, in which he proudly pointed it out.

While in the above situation, ethnic differences are downplayed in order to establish a sense of sameness across mixed-ethnicity relationships, I often observed the opposite dynamic in groups which shared ethnic backgrounds. In the following example, Umar stresses his ethnic identity in order to strengthen his relationship with another boy:

During break time, Umar walks around the playground with me. He says he is looking for a Malaysian boy from another class, who is older and often comes to his home to play.

I say: Does he speak the same language as you?

Umar says: Yes, he is from Malaysia too! We will go together to Malaysia. I have many friends in Malaysia!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 21 February 2012]

In this case, Umar stresses his country of origin, Malaysia, as the key connection to an older boy in school. Presumably, there is a link between the two families based on their shared country of origin, and, in this case, the shared ethnic background outweighs the otherwise often powerful category of age in children's friendships. The fact that Umar tells me about this friendship hints at his desire to make me aware of his Malaysian connections, which he seems proud of. During fieldwork, children often 'glorified' their countries of origin to some extent (in this case, 'I have many friends in Malaysia!') which might reflect particular family narratives. In Umar's case, the 'many friends' he claims to have in Malaysia are in contrast to his relatively isolated status in the class (which is in part due to the fact that he joined the class a few months into the school year).

The excerpt points towards the importance of family connections for the children's relationships in school, both within and beyond the P1/2 class of this research. Like Umar, many children have siblings, cousins or family friends in other classes with whom they play on the playground. Ethnicity appears to be a key factor in such family connections, in combination with other factors (see e.g. section 5.1.3), as also

the following example of American parents arranging playdates for their children shows:

Now the bell rings and I go to line up with the children.

Joshua is standing in front of me and turns around: Marlies, today I'm doing something really special after school!

Me: Oh really, what?

Joshua: I'm going to Catherine's brother!

Me: Oh nice!

Joshua: My dad says he likes Star Wars too! We are going to play Star Wars!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 22 March 2012]

Both Joshua's and Catherine's parents are American and presumably this is the link over which they have arranged this home visit for their children. Also in other interactions I have witnessed that Star Wars is a cultural phenomenon over which the American boys in the school bond. While it serves as a marker of American male identity, it also has a strong consumerist dimension, expressed in Star Wars branded toys, lunch boxes etc. Catherine's brother is a few years older than Joshua, and it is quite unusual to have a play date with someone with an age difference of a few years. It appears that the children's parents, and Joshua, construct a social identity constituted of nationality, gender and cultural consumerism (being American, male and liking Star Wars) in which age is given less importance. It seems to be more acceptable or desirable for Joshua to play with the older, male brother rather than the female classmate Catherine. Thus, while a form of belonging, based on being American, is constructed, Catherine remains excluded based on her gender and gendered play and consumerist interests.

In my fieldwork, I could not observe a clear tendency of relationships in school being homogeneous in terms of ethnicity (i.e. children only playing with children of the same ethnic group). Although girls and boys often played together, as illustrated above, close friendship groups, especially 'best friend' dyads and triads, were generally gender homogeneous. However, the way in which ethnicity was constructed in friendship groups differed. As illustrated in the examples used in this section, relationships were often performed by stressing similarities. This meant that

in same-ethnicity friendship groups, dimensions of ethnicity were emphasised, whereas in mixed-ethnicity friendship groups, they were downplayed. White Scottish children seemed to form an exception to this dynamic. In friendships between white Scottish children, their shared ethnicity was never explicitly addressed. White US American children, on the other hand, often drew on their shared American backgrounds. This dynamic has been explained through the fact that for children from the dominant majority (even if in this case not a majority ‘by numbers’) ethnic identity is usually taken for granted, since it is considered as a default position and ‘normality’, and therefore not worth to be stressed explicitly (Scourfield et al., 2006). Thus, while ethnicity can play a role in children’s friendships, e.g. due to parents’ networking beyond school, children’s relationships are much more complex, and children negotiate powerful discourses of similarities, differences, and ‘normality’.

### **5.3.3 Negotiating boundaries between school and home**

The teacher calls the children onto the carpet and introduces a new sound, ‘oy’. She writes words containing the sound on the promethean board.

Ms Brown writes: soy.

A murmur goes through the class and the children look confused.

Ms Brown: Do you not know what soy sauce is? It’s delicious! Raphael, do you know it?

Raphael grins and nods.

Ms Brown: Do mummy and daddy use it a lot in their cooking at home?

Raphael nods again, he looks proud.

Ms Brown continues to the whole class: If you eat Chinese food you use it.

Later that afternoon, Raphael joins me at the maths table. I take the opportunity to ask him about his Chinese name. In the class register he is listed with a Chinese name in Pinyin (Latin alphabet) writing, but everyone in school calls him Raphael.

I ask: Raphael, can I ask you something? Do you have a Chinese name?

He smiles and seems pleased that I ask, then he starts to giggle: It's a secret!

I smile: Oh, a secret? So you won't tell me?

He laughs and shouts: Nooo!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 13 March 2012]

The above situations show how Raphael's performing of his ethnic identity involve decisions on which aspects of his life 'at home' he discloses in school. In the first situation, the teacher talks about soy sauce, stresses it as positive ('it's delicious!'), and, with some prompting, asks Raphael to construct this as part of his ethnic background ('mummy and daddy use it a lot in their cooking'). On this occasion, Raphael seems to enjoy this disclosure of his Chinese identity, and the teacher allows him to gain recognition through his cultural knowledge which distinguishes him from the rest of the class. While Raphael seems happy to share this part of his life at home with the class, he is secretive about his Chinese name which he refuses to reveal on a number of occasions. His Chinese name is listed in the class register, but none of the other children knows it and I assume that most are not aware that he has another name outside of school.

Raphael's decision not to disclose his Chinese name could be part of a strategy to assimilate within the class and not emphasise any differences in his ethnic identity. It could also be that he prefers to keep his name, a highly personal matter, private. It is tempting to jump to the conclusion that Raphael uses his Chinese name in the 'private' sphere of the home, and his English name in the 'public' spaces of the school. However, since this study did not extend into the children's homes, I do not

know whether this is the case, and how he does perform his ethnic identity in his home.

What became clear in the course of the fieldwork, however, was that intersections between aspects of life at home and in school were complex and negotiated differently by different children. This was particularly apparent in the case of language use. While some children, whose first language was not English, announced their native tongue often and proudly (e.g. ‘I speak Urdu because my family speak Urdu!’), stressing the difference between their home and school language, others were rarely pointing out that their native tongue differed from English. Tahira, for example, on occasions refused to admit that she speaks Urdu, even when other children demanded that she disclosed it. This points towards complexities within the group of Urdu speaking children (e.g. in terms of religion, social class, politics etc.), into which I did not gain insights due to my own lack of knowledge of Urdu and other aspects of ‘being Urdu’. Although some children often pointed out that they spoke a different language, it was very rare for them to *actually* speak it in school. At Greenstone Primary, English is the undisputed lingua franca, and even children who struggled with English did not revert to their native tongues with their peers. A reason for this could be that speaking English represented the ‘norm’, and that thus speaking English meant to fit in and not be conspicuous. Another reason could be that language is more than just a ‘tool’ for communication, and that switching between languages also means to perform a switch between social identities, worldviews and values – which may cause disruptions with what is expected in school.

The following excerpt is an example of how some children in fact constructed a strict divide between school and ‘out of school’ life:

At break time on the playground, Tahira comes up to me:  
Marlies, my cousin says she is telling on me because I had  
chewing gum in the mosque and you’re not allowed chewing  
gum in the mosque, but I didn’t have chewing gum!

She is quite upset, and now her cousin walks by. Tahira grasps my hand and drags me over to her, and says: I didn't have chewing gum at the mosque!

The whole thing happened quickly and I don't know what to say.

The cousins looks at me coolly, she probably thinks I am a teaching assistant.

In quite a sharp voice she says to me: That's out of school stuff!

I say: Oh, well...

She says again, now louder: That's out of school stuff!

Then she walks off and I can see her whispering with some friends at the other side of the playground.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 20 April 2012]

Educational staff at Greenstone Primary are often asked to sort out children's disputes on the playground, and usually they intervene in mediating or disciplining ways whenever there is a conflict. In the above situation, Tahira would like me to fulfil such a role and help her to assert herself in front of her older cousin. The cousin presumably does not know about my role as a researcher, and I assume that she believes me to be a teaching assistant, and thus a representative of 'the school'. She makes it very clear that the school has no reach into what she calls 'out of school stuff' at the mosque, hinting that in this context, different rules and authorities are in place with which the school has no right to interfere. The distinction between school and 'out of school' can thus be seen as not only a spatial one, but also one of power relations. The incident that happened at the mosque has implications for the girls' relationships in the here and now at school. However, the cousin draws a clear boundary around what she perceives as not within influence or control of staff at school.

The examples in this section illustrate the complex processes through which children navigate the performing of their social identities at the intersection of life at school and at home. Sometimes, 'home aspects' of ethnic identities are kept hidden, which

may be an effort to construct sameness, or to protect aspects of social identity from being mixed with the mainstream culture at school. Other times, the separation of home and school lives may be due to different, and possibly incompatible, systems of practices, rules or authorities. Since this study did not gain insights into the children's homes, there are limitations to the interpretation of how children negotiate these boundaries in terms of their ethnic identities. It shows, however, that this is a complex process which children negotiate in diverse and dynamic ways.

### **5.3.4 Summary**

I have begun this section by showing how certain dimensions of ethnicity appear to be salient for different children in different situations. Such salient dimensions of ethnicity included, in line with relevant research on children's ethnic identities (Connolly, 1998; Devine and Kelly, 2006; Barron, 2007; Christou and Spyrou, 2012), language, country of origin/ nationality, food, religion and knowledge about cultural practices. Skin colour held an ambiguous position: while the children were clearly not 'colour-blind', but aware of differences in skin colour and their powerful social implications, they did not use skin colour in order to talk about their *own* ethnic identities (although of course, in talking about an 'other', ideas about one's own identity are being constructed implicitly). However, discussions about social segregation based on skin colour indicated that wider issues of social inequalities and segregation are reflected in the children's performing of their social identities, along with the relevance of heteronormative and age-related ideas about how people should 'live together'.

The children's performing of their ethnic identities, and which aspects were constructed as salient in particular situations, were influenced by the particular discourses around diversity in Greenstone Primary. In line with these discourses, children emphasised aspects of language, food, cultural and religious practices, and countries of origin. Ethnic identities were performed differently depending on the situations and children involved. It appeared that differences in ethnic backgrounds were either downplayed or emphasised in order to create a sense of similarity in

friendship groups. This also involved negotiations of ethnic identities at the intersection of home and school lives, illustrating the complexity and situatedness of the ways in which children perform their ethnic identities.



## 5.4 Conclusion

This Chapter has presented the multiple ways in which children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity at Greenstone Primary. By presenting examples from the children's lives at school I have given insights into the salience of social class, gender and ethnic identities for particular children, at different times and in different situations. Even though I have drawn out the significance of social class, gender and ethnicity in children's social identities respectively, each section has also showed that the ways in which these social identities are performed are complex and intersecting.

Section 5.1 has showed the significance of classed practices, rooted in economic realities, for children performing their social identities. I have showed how objects, such as branded clothing or particular foods, are given symbolic meanings and are used to construct classed status and relationships. Such practices are highly normative and complex, with different dynamics at play simultaneously. While some staff have acknowledged the importance of social class (as discussed in Chapter 4), class differences in Greenstone Primary are often muted and 'addressed' by treating all children in the same way. However, discourses around 'good' food, for example, have showed that classed assumptions implicitly give value to particular ways of being, which shape the context in which children perform their social class identities.

Section 5.2 on children's performing of gender identities has demonstrated the commonness and significance of gendered interactions. In line with Davies (2003), the section has showed how important it is for children to do gender 'correctly', i.e. corresponding to dominant discourses of masculinity and femininity. The significance of 'doing it right' may be heightened by the particular context of the school, where all interactions are constantly geared towards and evaluated by what children *learn* from them: school is fundamentally about learning – not only skills, but ways of being. Heteronormative gender relations appeared as a key factor in how gender identities are performed. The section has also showed that children *do* challenge dominant gender discourses (e.g. boys can like pink too), although this is

only acceptable if approved by others, and highlights the complexity, ambivalence and situatedness of children's agency in performing their social identities (Valentine, 2011; Oswell, 2013).

Section 5.3 has discussed how the children perform their ethnic identities in a variety of ways by drawing on different dimensions of ethnicity, e.g. language, food, cultural customs and countries of origin. The salience of these dimensions, and the relative silencing of physical characteristics, is in line with the particular institutional discourses around diversity in Greenstone Primary. The performing of ethnic identities was an important factor for the children's relationships, and often either foregrounded or downplayed in a way to construct similarities.

Fieldnote excerpts discussed throughout this Chapter have indicated a complex link between children's lives at home and in school. Parental networks are an important factor for children's relationships, for example through organising regular home visits which strengthen children's friendships in school. Children also navigated the intersections of home and school in various ways, by disclosing or concealing different aspects of their social identities in different situations.

The children's social identities are located within the discourses around diversity which I discussed in Chapter 4, and they both reflect and contradict these discourses in multiple ways. For example, the dimensions of ethnic identity that were foregrounded were in line with the school's 'celebratory discourse' of diversity which foregrounded similar aspects. However, those aspects of social identities that were not part of the celebratory school discourse – physical markers of ethnicity, gender and social class – were still highly significant for the ways in which children performed their social identities.

In fact, some children's understandings of how people should 'live together' (by ethnicity, heteronormative gender relations and age), of what constitutes 'good' lifestyle choices (e.g. particular brands of yogurts), and of entitlement (e.g. boys should have bigger rubbers because of their inherent superiority), illustrated that children were aware of, and contributed to, powerful discourses of social class,

gender and ethnic inequalities in our society. In performing their social identities of social class, gender and ethnicity in particular ways, these inequalities became manifest in the children's social identities at certain moments. The fact that the institutional discourses around diversity did not address such inequalities did not make them disappear, but, rather, left them unchallenged. This shows that, while Greenstone Primary's discourses and practices may aim to create a microcosmos of equality and social justice, the school cannot evade its being part of, and organised by, wider social relations in which inequalities persist.

Overall, the analysis in this Chapter has showed that the children's social identities are deeply *relational*: it is through relationships that one's own and others' identities are constructed, and become visible and observable. This makes processes of performing social identities ubiquitous: seemingly 'neutral' objects or practices (e.g. pencils, rubbers and educational worksheets) are constantly invested with meanings in order for the children to perform who they *are*, and who they *are not*.

The ways in which social identities are performed are also dependent on the particular *context*, and children's identities in one situation may sometimes contradict their identities in other situations. The ways in which the children perform their social identities are thus ambivalent and contradictory.

Finally, the examples in this Chapter have also showed that the children perform their social identities in highly *complex* ways. Few, if any, examples in this Chapter can be analysed by reducing the children's interactions to only one category (social class *or* gender *or* ethnicity). Also other categories, such as age, have appeared as important factors for how social identities were performed in particular moments.

Performing social identities is not a 'neutral' process, but deeply invested with values and dynamics of power, and constantly generates groups of 'us' and 'them', creating moments of belonging and being different. Relational dynamics – pairs of 'best friends', dyadic or triadic groups – have intersected with performing particular identity categories. I now move on to explore such relational dynamics of belonging

and being different, and draw out the emotional and normative aspects of performing social identities at the intersections.

## Chapter 6: Belonging and being different: performing emotional identities at the intersections

In Chapter 5 I have discussed how the children in this study perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of Greenstone Primary. I have shown that this performing is a fluid, contextual and complex process. Although particular social identity categories may appear as salient in specific situations, categories cannot be reduced to each other, but intersect and constitute each other in the children's identities (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; Yuval-Davis, 2006b). The examples analysed in Chapter 5 have given insights into how social identities are performed in particular ways in specific contexts. They have demonstrated the key importance of relationships: performing social identities is a fundamentally relational process, and issues of sameness and difference are at the heart of it. Both Chapter 4 and 5 have drawn attention to the importance of normative ideas and values about how certain social identities are performed (or 'should be' performed), e.g. what social identities are aligned with being 'good' (or with being 'bad').

In this Chapter, I now take this analysis further by looking at the emotional and normative aspects of the ways in which social identities are performed. I do so through the lenses of belonging and being different, and this makes it possible to go beyond the tripartite structure (social class, gender and ethnicity) of the previous Chapter, but instead to explore their *intersections* in depth. These lenses were selected due to their salience in my fieldwork observations, and are not seen as mutually exclusive, but as connected and overlapping. Using examples from fieldnotes and interviews with children, I discuss the ways in which *relational, interpersonal dynamics intersect* with forms of *belonging and being different in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity*.

## 6.1 Understanding belonging: intersections and emotions

Whether ‘in abstract logic or messy everyday practice’, the concepts of similarity and difference cannot be thought of as independent of each other, but are fundamentally interrelated (Jenkins, 2008: 22). As discussed in Chapter 2, performing social identities always involves ‘classifying oneself and others’, since defining who we *are* requires defining who we *are not* – who, where and what we belong to, and who, where and what we differ from (Jenkins, 2008: 24). However, this polar and mutually exclusive understanding of belonging and being different is thrown into question if the very notions of similarities and differences are understood as socially constructed: as Jenkins (2008: 24) argues, ‘absolute absorption in others’ as well as ‘absolute differentiation from others’ are highly unlikely, and there can thus be no complete belonging or complete being different.

In this Chapter I propose that an intersectional lens is useful in order to understand the complex, multifaceted and contradictory nature of belonging and being different. I also suggest that the analysis of belonging and being different can benefit from paying attention to the role of emotions, as well as to the ways in which relational, interpersonal dynamics intersect with forms of belonging and being different in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Belonging, according to Yuval-Davis (2006a, 2010, 2011), is a complex process. People can ‘belong’ to individual persons or groups, in abstract or concrete ways, and through processes of self-identification or identification by others. Belonging tends to be naturalized and part of everyday practices. It is about ‘an emotional (or even ontological) attachment, about feeling “at home”’ (2011: 10). One aspect of people’s belonging is their positionality (both through self-identification and through being positioned by others) in terms of their gender, ethnicity, social class, age, sexuality etc.. Yuval-Davis sees these categories as social and economic ‘locations’, which, depending on the historical context, are implicated in specific social power relations and constitute each other in particular ways. Drawing on Butler (1990;

1993), Yuval-Davis (2006a) suggests that in everyday lives, people *perform* their belonging to a particular social class, gender, ethnicity etc. through repetitive practices. Butler (1993: 9) argues that through repetition, the effects of ‘boundary, fixity and surface’ of groups and identities come to materialize. Yuval-Davis stresses that these repetitive practices are not only cognitive, but emphasizes that they are also deeply emotional processes. Belonging is not static, but shifting, and potentially contradictory, and not all forms of belonging are equally important to people depending on their particular emotional investments in different forms of belonging.

In recent years, children’s emotions, in educational contexts and beyond, have received increasing attention in research, especially in the field of children’s geographies (Blazek and Windram-Geddes, 2013), and particularly since geography’s ‘emotional turn’ (Bondi et al., 2005). Such research has drawn attention to the place of emotions in research with children (Gillies and Robinson, 2010; Procter, 2013), children’s emotional attachments to places (den Besten, 2010), and in relation to issues of agency and control (Gordon, 2006; Hemming, 2007; Harden, 2012; Kraftl, 2013). An emerging body of research has begun to pay attention to the role of emotions for children’s identities and relationships (Ahn, 2010; Zembylas, 2011; Holt et al., 2013; Wood, 2013; Haavind et al., 2014), and this study contributes to this body of work.

In line with Ahmed, I conceptualise emotions here not as internal psychological states of the individual, but as social and cultural practices which contribute to how notions of social identities, groups and collectivities are constructed:

... emotions are not simply something ‘I’ or ‘we’ have.  
Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects  
and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the ‘I’ and  
‘we’ are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with  
others. (Ahmed, 2004b: 10)

Ahmed does not claim that emotions are both internal and external, both psychological and social, but that emotions contribute to the very construction of these distinctions.

In other words, emotions are not ‘in’ either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects. (Ahmed, 2004b: 10)

Thus, both the ‘I’ and the ‘you’, or the ‘us’ and ‘them’, and their distinction, materialize through performances which are shaped by emotional processes. Much research on children’s emotions acknowledges the social dimensions of emotions, and either draws on or criticizes the concept of children’s emotional socialization (i.e. children learn how to feel and express their emotions in ‘appropriate’ ways) (e.g. Ahn, 2010; Harden, 2012). In this research I view emotions, in line with Ahmed’s interpretation of Butler (1993), as performances which ‘both repeat past associations as well as generating their object’ (Ahmed, 2004a: 32). For example, if someone perceives an other as hateful, that someone is filled with hate, and this serves as proof of the perception.

In the following sections, I draw on these concepts in order to discuss examples of the complex feelings of belonging and being different of children in Greenstone Primary, the importance of emotions in these processes, and how interpersonal and relational dynamics intersect with belonging and being different in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity.



## 6.2 Belonging

In this section I explore how the children performed their belonging to different groups, by drawing attention to socio-spatial dimensions of belonging, the ways in which feelings of belonging are personally and emotionally invested, and the chasms that children may experience between their intersecting and sometimes ambivalent belonging to multiple groups. A range of emotions – happiness, anger, pride, sadness, excitement, longing, love – are expressed to give significance to particular dimensions of the children's social identities, and to the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are involved in this. The section highlights that paying attention to emotions and relationships can provide insights into the different meanings that certain social identities hold for different children.

### 6.2.1 A socio-spatial lens: belonging to multiple social locations

There is a close affinity between the theoretical field of intersectionality and the discipline of geography. In Chapter 2 I have identified an emerging body of intersectional research in the field of children's geographies (e.g. Scourfield et al., 2006; Evans and Holt, 2011; Zembylas, 2010; Konstantoni, 2012), and the field of human geography more widely (e.g. Valentine, 2007; Hopkins and Noble, 2009). Geographical metaphors have also been important in conceptualising the intersecting nature of identity categories, e.g. as 'crossroads' (Crenshaw, 1991; Minow, 1997). Anthias (2002: 276) suggests to replace notions of 'identity' with 'location' or 'positionality', and Yuval-Davis (2006a: 200, my emphasis) talks about how belonging to 'social *locations* is constructed along multiple *axes* of difference, such as gender, social class, race and ethnicity'. Indeed, this significance given to socio-spatial aspects of identities and forms of belonging resonates with many of my fieldwork observations, such as the following example of a conversation between children in the classroom:

I sit at the drawing table with Tahira, Asya and Fatima and we are chatting.

Tahira shouts, happily: Marlies, today is my last day and then I go on holiday!

Today is Thursday and next week spring break starts.

I say: Oh really, are you not coming in tomorrow?

Tahira (very happy and excited): Noooo, I'm going to Pakistan!

Now Fatima shouts: I'm going to Pakistan too, I'm Pakistani!

(She seems proud and happy. I noticed before that Fatima has a strong Pakistani identity and is always proud to stress it, whereas Tahira usually doesn't stress it.)

Now Asya says: I'm going tooooo!

(The teacher told me that Asya is from Turkey. Asya herself has never mentioned the name of her country of origin).

Fatima says to Asya, sounding angry: No you're not going!

Asya: Yes, I am going!

Fatima shouts at her, angrily: But you don't speak the language!

I ask Asya: Where are you going on holidays Asya?

Asya: I don't remember...

She mumbles something that I cannot understand.

Tahira says to me: I have to speak Urdu in Pakistan but I like better Dubai 'cause I don't have to speak Urdu and we have a biiiiiig swimming pool in Dubai. I was jumping in and out and I almost killed myself, Marlies! I was two times in Pakistan and two times in Dubai. I like Dubai better because of the big house and the big swimming pool!

Fatima says to Tahira: I am going to Pakistan.

The children are called to a different activity by the teacher.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 9 February 2012]

Tahira, Fatima and Asya construct their multiple forms of belonging by discussing their upcoming holiday trips, and they perform their social identities in relation to multiple axes of difference: countries, nationality, language, and social class. The places mentioned in the conversation – Pakistan, Dubai – are physically remote from the context of Greenstone Primary, but nevertheless feature often and prominently in the children's lives and relationships. For Fatima, going to Pakistan and speaking Urdu are both markers of her identity as 'being Pakistani', which she asserts strongly and confidently. It appears that she invests this form of belonging – to a nation and community – with pride and joy, and she seems angry when she perceives Asya as infringing the boundary which she has drawn around the category of 'being Pakistani'. Fatima foregrounds their different native languages in order to exclude Asya from this particular form of belonging.

While Fatima highlights dimensions of ethnicity (being Pakistani, speaking 'the language') in order to construct a collectivity that she belongs to, Tahira draws on multiple social 'locations' which make her belonging more complex and ambivalent. She emphasizes her upcoming holiday in Pakistan and seems to be looking forward to it. At the same time, she wants me to know about her connections to Dubai, and her more positive emotional attachment to the latter. She explains her preference for Dubai as due to material aspects, i.e. with her access to 'the big house and big swimming pool', as well as with 'not having to speak Urdu'. The latter statement resonates with other observations during my fieldwork, in which I noticed that Tahira did not like to disclose the fact that she speaks Urdu when confronted by other Urdu-speaking children. A reason for this could be that her Urdu is not very good, or that she may have a particular accent. Given the multiple meanings that 'being Urdu' can have in relation to other dimensions of ethnicity, e.g. it can stand for nationality, religion, food (as outlined in Chapter 5), she could also have other reasons for not wanting to be associated with 'Urdu'. Tahira's prioritization of her belonging to Dubai, at least in part due to the material resources it provides, could be interpreted as a class-differentiated attitude to space and place, as a place that she feels reflects her social identity and allows her to feel in control (Reay and Lucey, 2000a; 2000b). It could also be interpreted as her awareness of and contribution to discourses of

global power relations, constructing her 'wealthy' connections to Dubai as preferable in relation to Pakistan.

Asya, finally, claims to go on holiday to Pakistan as well, but is challenged by Fatima, and this illustrates how forms of belonging not only depend on self-identification but also on identification by others (Yuval-Davis, 2006a). It remains unclear whether Asya is, in fact, going to Pakistan during the holidays, or somewhere else. The conversation resonates with other observations about Asya's 'uncertain' ethnic belonging, e.g. she could not identify which language she was speaking (see Chapter 5). This ambiguity might be explained through the fact that ethnicity does not have a big significance for Asya, or that her ethnic background is too complex to be explained, particularly in English as an additional language (for example, if she is indeed from Turkey as the teacher claims, her family could be part of a minority ethnic group within Turkey, or from mixed ethnic groups). Her claim to go on holidays, but being unsure where to, could also be interpreted as an attempt to construct a classed belonging (stressing that her family, too, are able to go on holiday) rather than belonging to an ethnic community.

The emphasis on place in the above conversation resonates with literature from the field of children's geographies which stresses the importance of the socio-spatial (e.g. Vanderbeck and Dunkley, 2004; Horton and Kraftl, 2005; Horton et al., 2008; den Besten, 2010). Scourfield et al. (2006) suggest that immediate local places feature most vividly in children's talk and are most significant for their everyday experiences. However, children also have extensive knowledges of global, national, local and domestic places, and their significance varies for different children. Children's attachment to particular places is strongly related to wider geo-cultural discussions (e.g. making class-based distinctions of 'rough' and 'respectable' areas) and particularly shaped through family relationships – a point that resonates with the above conversation. In their study with 8-11 year-old children in Wales, Scourfield et al. (2006) found that ethnic origin played a key role for the children's constructions of their national identities, whereas they did not find gender or social class to be particularly important variables. The importance of dimensions of ethnicity indeed also transpired in the above conversation between Fatima, Tahira and Asya.

However, the conversation also illustrates that, particularly for those children with multiple and complex ethnic family backgrounds – such as Tahira – other categories, like social class, may well play a significant role in constructing and valuing particular forms of belonging.

The children also engage in what Yuval-Davis (2006a; 2011) terms the ‘politics of belonging’ by constructing certain forms of belonging as homogeneous (only Urdu-speaking people can claim to be Pakistani) and exclusive (since Asya does not speak Urdu, she cannot be part of the group of Pakistani people). Fatima draws a boundary around ‘being Pakistani’, and defines who stands inside and outside of this boundary, investing the belonging to this group with notions of entitlement, status and power relations. Tahira engages in politics of belonging by constructing what can be interpreted as a hierarchy of her national belongings on a global level. While there is some overlap between her and Fatima’s belonging to Pakistan, she distinguishes herself through her belonging to Dubai, which she constructs as superior.

Summing up, in this section I have used the conversation between Fatima, Tahira and Asya in order to illustrate the children’s complex forms of belonging to multiple social locations, and how these locations and their intersections are invested with emotions which shape the children’s identifications (and non-identifications) in particular ways. A range of emotions – happiness, anger, pride, excitement – are expressed to give significance to particular dimensions of the children’s social identities, and to the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are involved in this (e.g. Fatima seems ‘angry’ when she perceives her Pakistani identity as being challenged, and both Tahira and Fatima appear to be ‘proud’ in constructing their particular national identities as desirable or superior). The children’s narratives about their belonging are not clear-cut and singular, but, such as in Tahira’s case, express multiple narratives of belonging simultaneously (cf. Ludvig, 2006) – belonging to Pakistan or Dubai, speaking different languages, and having access to different resources, which are invested with different values. The example also shows that belonging depends not only on claiming a certain identity, but also requires that it is recognised and accepted by others (Yuval-Davis, 2006a; Valentine et al., 2009).

## 6.2.2 Personal and emotional investments in belonging

Both Yuval-Davis (2006a) and Ahmed (2004b) stress the significant role of emotions in how identities and groups are constructed and politicized. In this section, I draw particular attention to the place of emotions in how social identities, and forms of belonging, are invested with meanings and emotions which are shaped by and expressed through personal relationships.

Harden (2012: 92) claims that in educational contexts, emotions are regulated by the particular institutional expectations of the school. The regulation of children's emotions serves to establish a certain social order, and children mainly learn to *hide* their emotions as part of 'learning how to act in a "civilized" way'. This was certainly the case to some extent in the fieldwork of this study, as 'good' behaviour often involved the absence of any emotions which would interfere with learning and order (such emotions could be, for example, excitement, rage, agitation, or being upset). However, a state of no discernible emotions can be seen as an emotional state in itself, and, often, children's emotions became 'visible' for me only in very subtle interactions and conversations. Such subtle interactions allowed insights into how the children performed their social identities, and constructed their feelings of belonging, as I explain here through the example of Evie performing her 'Scottishness'.

From the start of my fieldwork, I noticed that Evie expressed a strong Scottish national identity by drawing Scottish flags on almost all of her pictures or exercises. This was quite unusual, since none of the other children in the class used flags to express their national identities, and none of the other white Scottish children, of which group I thought Evie was a part, ever mentioned or stressed their Scottish national identity (an observation explained through the fact that children from the dominant majority may take their ethnic identity for granted and therefore do not feel the need to perform it explicitly (cf. Scourfield et al., 2006, see also Chapter 5)). Whenever other children spoke about their national belongings (such as Fatima and Tahira in the previous section), they often appeared happy and proud, and actively involved others in performing their national identities. Evie constantly personalised

her work with Scottish flags, but rarely pointed this out to others, and seemed to be in deep earnest and with grave facial expressions when doing so.

After some weeks, and over a number of conversations, Evie told me that her mother was Polish, although Evie didn't speak any Polish herself, and that her father was Scottish. In a sad tone she explained that her parents had recently separated and since then she only had rare contact with her father. She was very happy when she did get to see him, and looking forward to such visits with excitement and anticipation. After learning this information, I began to see interactions such as the following in a new light:

Evie says: Look Marlies, I am drawing a picture for my daddy.

With a serious and concentrated expression, she draws some flowers and dashes.

Are these fireworks? I ask.

Evie says: Yes.

She draws some blue dashes: I am making a blue firework 'cause it is my daddy's favourite colour!

Then, as always, she draws a Scottish flag.

Then she asks me: How do you spell 'For my daddy?'

I tell her that it is three words and together we spell them out. She happily takes the painting and takes it to her tray.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 2 December 2011]

In this and many similar situations, Evie's social identity as being Scottish was presumably constituted by her relationship with her father. Drawing a Scottish flag may have served to express both feelings of longing for and belonging to this part of her family's cultural heritage. I also wondered if 'Scottishness' was of particular importance as a category over which Evie and her father bonded emotionally, since she seemed to use Scottish flags in order to decorate and personalise all drawings prepared for him, implying that this was something that she expected him to value. Yuval-Davis (2006a) argues that belonging tends to be articulated or politicized

particularly if is being threatened, and this could indeed apply to Evie's example – because her relationship with her father, and with it the Scottish part of her social identity, is under strain, she may articulate her belonging to her father, and to the Scottish part of her social identity, more strongly.

The example shows how belonging is highly emotional and complex, and a number of dynamics may be at play which are beyond the researcher's, and possibly the children's, awareness. On a methodological note, this excerpt shows how in ethnographic research, contextual knowledge impacts on the understanding of a specific situation – over the course of some weeks, and after developing a relationship with me, Evie had decided to reveal information about her parents' separation, and this opened up a new angle of interpretation for the above and other similar situations. The insights into her personal life – the upsetting experience of her parents' separation, her feelings of distance and threat to her relationship with her father – evoked deep empathy in me and pointed me towards the importance of complex emotional experiences which impact on the children's social identities, but may not always reveal themselves.

The example also illustrates that personal identities are not separable from the socio-cultural domain, and that social identities are deeply related to interpersonal and emotional experiences. Identities are performed, according to Butler (1990), within regulative discourses. Different discourses – whether hegemonic or subordinate – make available different identity positions to individuals (Frosh et al., 2003). Evie's performing of her Scottishness, in this case, can be seen as one of the many possible forms of belonging that she could have performed through her drawings, but her particular personal and emotional investment leads her to construct her belonging in this specific way, at this particular moment in time. The meaning of 'being Scottish' in this context is delineated and shaped through Evie's emotional investment in this category – possibly feelings of longing, belonging and love. This illustrates that 'being Scottish' has a particular meaning for Evie, which presumably differs from what 'being Scottish' means to other children. Thus, the example shows that paying attention to emotions not only gives insights into how specific social identities, and



forms of belonging, are constructed, but also makes it possible to recognise how the meanings of these identities and groups may differ for different people.

### **6.2.3 Belonging to different ‘worlds’**

Despite the institutional discourses in Greenstone Primary, which highlight and celebrate certain dimensions of diversity, specific situations produce particular demands on ‘fitting in’. The following conversation is an example of how the practice of celebrating Christmas produces moments of belonging and being different for some children:

Raphael, Damien and Fatima sit around the drawing table and are chatting.

Raphael: We have a Christmas tree!

Damien: We have a Christmas tree!

He laughs excitedly.

Raphael: Ours is this big! (He points about his own height.)

Damien: Ours is THIS big! (He points a little bit higher.)

Fatima says, sounding quite contently: We don’t have a Christmas tree in our world.

Later that day, on the playground, Fatima comes up to me. She looks sad and says quietly: Marlies, I don’t have a Christmas tree.

I say: That’s ok Fatima. I don’t have a Christmas tree either.

She seems relieved and walks away.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 20 December 2012]

The excerpt is an example of how Fatima’s social identity ‘rubs up’ (Valentine, 2007) against dominant cultural practices in school, and gives an insight into the many and multifaceted differences that children need to negotiate as part of their

social identities and belongings. Christmas is one of the main cultural events celebrated throughout the year in Greenstone Primary. Although the curriculum briefly explains the religious background, staff as well as most of the children celebrate Christmas as a non-confessional, secular event. In addition to cultural traditions, such as singing Christmas songs, opening Christmas calendars and making seasonal decorations, the event is infused with strong consumerist elements in the form of presents, merchandising, etc.. Thus, celebrating Christmas happens at the intersections of religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic practices.

In the above situation, Raphael and Damien establish a sense of sameness over their families' celebration of Christmas. Raphael's parents are Chinese, and Damien's French, but ethnic differences are downplayed in this moment as they both stress their similar Christmas practices. They express their happiness and anticipation of the upcoming Christmas celebrations by talking excitedly about it and laughing. They also engage in a light-hearted form of competition over the height of their families' Christmas trees, participating in a material contest, and potentially in a gendered performing of their masculinities in relation to power and potency. Fatima, whose family does not celebrate Christmas, states that 'they' do not have a Christmas tree 'in their world'. The 'we' and 'our' may refer to her family, or to her wider community, which may refer to her ethnic, cultural, religious, classed etc. background. The expression 'world' indicates the chasm that she experiences between her multiple forms of belongings. At first, she sounds quite content when referring to not having a Christmas tree in 'her world', which may be a way of expressing that she is happy with the fact that 'her world' differs, and values these different practices. Her 'contentedness' may also be a way of performing a sense of indifference in order to justify her different 'world'.

While in the classroom she seems content to state that she does not have a Christmas tree, she finds me later on the playground and this time expresses sadness about being excluded from the practices of celebrating Christmas. It can be seen as an exclusion on multiple intersecting levels: from the cultural mainstream in the school (and beyond), from religious or religiously coined majority practices, and from the strong commercial and socio-economic aspects of this event which lead to

competitive dynamics among the children. My spontaneous response is to comfort her through the fact that I, too, do not have a Christmas tree, following my feeling that her being different from ‘the norm’ is what causes her to feel sad. (Although my response is an ambivalent one and not completely honest, since I am involved in cultural celebrations of Christmas even though I do not have a ‘tree’ – and I presume that Fatima is aware of this to some extent.) Indeed, she seems ‘relieved’ at my statement, and this points towards the fact that being similar, or having an ally in being different, is perceived as positive.

Fatima is one of many children in the class for whom being in Greenstone Primary highlights a – permanent or temporary – feeling of being different. The following excerpt shows how Catherine constructs her belonging, by which she distinguishes herself from others:

I sit with Catherine and some other children at a table.

Out of the blue, Catherine says to me: Marlies, you know I am from America!

I say: Yes, I know.

Catherine: That’s my real place! I am actually just here for a bit ‘cause my dad is here for a bit.

She sounds quite passionate, and slightly nostalgic.

I say: Does he just work here for a bit?

Catherine: Yes, work.

She falls silent and looks thoughtful, as if she was somewhere else in her mind.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 March 2012]

Quite unexpectedly in this situation, Catherine initiates a conversation about her being American. She directs the statement at me, instead of the other children around, which points towards the fact that it is important for her that I (as a researcher, adult, or foreigner like her?) know and recognize that she is different from the others. She refers to America as her ‘real’ place, stressing that this is where

she and her family *actually* belong. She sounds passionate and nostalgic, as if longing for returning to a place which may allow her to be the ‘real’ her. Her statement hints at the fact that being in Scotland, as opposed to her ‘real’ place America, requires her to belong to a place in which she needs to *perform* an identity that is somehow not genuine. She emphasizes the temporary nature of her stay in Scotland (‘just here for a bit’) and implies that her current situation is just a transitory identity, contrasted with her ‘real’ belonging. In this situation, it appears that Catherine decides to stress her different belonging without being prompted by any specific event. This indicates that she perceives her ‘being different’ as something that she wants others to know about.

The two examples in this section have shown how ways of being and belonging often become visible through difference:

When individual identities are ‘done’ differently in particular temporal moments they rub up against, and so expose, these dominant spatial orderings that define who is in place/out of place, who belongs and who does not. (Valentine, 2007: 19)

By disclosing that she does not have a Christmas tree, Fatima constructs ‘her world’ as fundamentally different from the practices in school. Both Fatima and Catherine quite confidently claim their belonging to different worlds or places. Yuval-Davis (2011) suggests that national belonging is one of the most salient and important forms of belonging to particular collectivities in the contemporary world, and this is in line with Catherine’s reference to (US) America as her ‘real’ place. However, Fatima’s example shows that belonging to ‘her world’ is much more complex than that, and may refer to cultural, religious and economic practices simultaneously.

The children’s different forms of belonging are invested with different emotions, which give them a particular meaning, and are closely linked to their personal relationships, such as family connections to particular places and practices. Sometimes, being different or belonging is expressed through positive emotions and quite vocally, for example through expressions of happiness, pride or love. Other times, it appears to be invested with negative emotions – longing, sadness, loneliness – which tend to be expressed in more quiet, subtle ways. However, the expressions

can be ambivalent. Catherine, for example, appears both happy and proud of her American identity, but at the same time sad and nostalgic in the particular circumstances. Fatima's emotional investment into her belonging also seems ambivalent, as she appears both content about belonging to a particular 'world' but at the same time sad at being excluded from another. Thus, this section has highlighted how forms of belonging and being different can be intersecting, complex and ambivalent.

## 6.3 Being different

The concept of ‘difference’ has received much attention in theorizations of identities and inequalities, particularly in feminist literature (e.g. Young, 1990; West and Fenstermaker, 1995; Anthias, 2002; Bottero and Irwin, 2003; Robinson and Jones-Diaz, 2006; Ahmed, 2012). It has been argued that ‘identities depend on the marking of difference’ (Gilroy, 1997: 302). As outlined at the beginning of this Chapter, I suggest that it makes no sense to treat belonging, and being different as separable, or to give greater significance to either of them (Jenkins, 2008). However, drawing on the experiences of my fieldwork, I agree that differences may appear to be more ‘observable’ than similarities, as they tended to catch my eye more frequently. I suggest that this is due to the fact that, as Valentine (2007) claims, it is often only through differences, discontinuities and disidentifications, that otherwise unquestioned ‘normal’ and normative practices become exposed. In this section I draw attention to such moments of ‘exposure’ through constructions of differences, which illuminate who belongs, and who does not, in particular moments and contexts.

### 6.3.1 Children’s friendships and academic performance

Many examples discussed in Chapter 5 have already pointed towards the significance of friendship groups of dyads and triads for many children in this study. Such dynamics and groupings may intersect with forms of belonging or being different in relation to particular social identities of social class, gender or ethnicity. As I have discussed in Chapter 5, triads and dyads were generally gender-homogenous: although boys and girls *do* play together, close-knit friendship groups, such as ‘best friends’ pairs, are usually formed between girls *or* boys only. Ethnic differences are downplayed in ethnicity-mixed friendships, and ethnicity is emphasized in same-ethnicity friendships (except for ‘white Scottish’ groups of friends, where ethnicity was rarely mentioned at all). Examples in Chapter 5 have pointed towards the

sometimes difficult dynamics of negotiating dyads of ‘best friends’ and groups of three. Many children constantly move between friendship groups of twos and threes, which can sometimes be a painful experience (Thorne, 1993; Dunn, 2004). The following conversation illustrates the significance of these dynamics, and shows that they are very consciously perceived and reflected on by some children:

Brenda, Catherine and Asya are sitting in the quiet corner and appear to be talking over a book. As I walk by, Brenda shouts: Marlies! Marlies!

I turn towards them.

Brenda: Marlies, can three people be best friends?

Quite spontaneously I say: I would think so. Why?

But immediately I realise what is going on: Brenda and Catherine are very close, and Asya wants to join their friendship group.

Brenda says doubtfully: I don’t think that three people can be best friends...

Catherine suggests, in a questioning tone: Maybe Asya can be next... (I assume she means ‘next in line’ after her and Brenda).

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 June 2012]

This excerpt indicates the importance of friendship groupings and questions of closeness and intimacy. In this case, Brenda may be asking for my help to sort out the apparent difficulty, or she may be looking for me to condone the fact that Asya cannot be quite part of her and Catherine’s close relationship of ‘best friends’. The status of ‘best friends’ provides security within the classroom, and protection from bullying (Dunn, 2004). While there is a dominant narrative promoted by staff in Greenstone Primary that ‘we are all friends’, and that no kind of exclusion is acceptable, Brenda and Catherine *do* question whether, in fact, everyone can be equally closely related. Indeed, they suggest that Asya can be ‘next’, that is, still part of their group, but not as close as the two ‘best friends’. From this particular situation it is not clear what prompts the decision and particular hierarchy within the group.

Ethnicity may play a part: Brenda (whose parents are Scottish) and Catherine (who identifies as American) share English as their mother tongue, whereas Asya's ethnic background is uncertain (as discussed in Chapter 5, teachers suspect that her family comes from Turkey, but neither the children nor staff ultimately know about her ethnic background and mother tongue). Ethnicity may be a factor in the girls' relationship, but there is no indication in this conversation that this is the case. On other occasions, it became more clear that aspects of children's friendships were related to particular ways of performing their social identities.

An example is the friendship group between Laura, Krystle and Eleanor. The three girls, together with Patrick and Aamil, form the P2 cohort in the class. This means that the five children are often grouped together for academic reasons and also form a specific social group within the class. Age and gender were thus of key importance for the friendship group of Krystle, Eleanor and Laura, but other factors also appeared to play a part, as the following excerpt illustrates:

The classroom is filled by a buzz of activity, as the children are working in groups or independently on different work stations around the room.

Another teacher enters the classroom. She is here to 'have a look' at Laura. She hands the class teacher some forms to fill in, 'from the council'. They whisper, both looking at Laura who is supposed to be working at the creative table with Krystle, Eleanor, Patrick and Aamil, but actually has turned her back to them and is playing with the sand tray in a corner.

I can hear the class teacher whispering: Do you see what I mean?

The other teacher nods meaningfully.

I wonder, if it is so obvious to me who they are talking about, that it must also be obvious for the children, and for Laura.

Now the other teacher goes over to Laura and talks to her very friendly for a little while. Then she takes her outside the classroom to 'listen to her reading for a bit'.

[...]



Later that day, just before the morning break, the children drink their milk, sitting in groups on the carpet.

Patrick, Krystle and Laura sit next to each other and discuss what activity to do next.

Patrick says to Krystle: Are you gonna play racing again after the break?

Racing is a Formula One themed board game for up to five people that the P2s are sometimes allowed to play during lesson time, because it requires them to count and calculate.

Krystle smiles brightly: Yes!

Laura: But then I can't play...

She starts to cry.

I ask: Why can't Laura play racing?

Krystle: Because she doesn't want to play it! Eleanor and I played it 13 times this morning!

She giggles proudly.

I say: Wow that's a lot.

Laura remains silent.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 9 February 2012]

This excerpt highlights the importance of academic achievement in the children's lives at school, and the impact this may have on children's status and relationships with others. Academic achievement is at the heart of life in school for both children and staff. As outlined in Chapter 2, achievement is a well-researched area in relation to children and social class, with research continuously pointing out a complex link between social class and achievement (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000; Raffo et al., 2007; Goodman and Gregg, 2010). However, this link has been mostly investigated in terms of parents' attitudes and involvement in schooling (Reay, 2001; Whitty, 2001; Vincent and Ball, 2007) and research has rarely explored how children themselves make sense of it (with the exception of Kellett and Dar, 2007).

During my fieldwork it became clear that, in the P1/2 class of this study, most children highly valued good school achievements, and good performances were seen as positive and prestigious. This became salient, for example, through the fact that 'needing help' with school tasks was perceived as negative, and children who could 'help' others with their work enjoyed a positive standing (also tying into the children's constant striving for independence and maturity). Praise from the teacher was highly regarded and the children proudly wore stickers or medals awarded for and displaying their academic success. An orchestrated system of meritocracy permeated the organisational procedures of the whole school, with complex systems in place for rewarding academic achievement on an individual, class, and school level (e.g. awarding the 'class of the week' title during assembly meetings, based on individual children's acquisitions of 'gold stars' throughout the week). It is against this background that experiencing academic difficulties can be understood as unpleasant and upsetting, and as going beyond the process of learning, but also having implications for the children's social status and relationships.

The above excerpt gives an insight into Laura's experiences of being positioned as having academic difficulties. Compared to the rest of the P2 group in class, Laura has fallen behind in terms of her academic performance, to an extent that the teacher is concerned about her progress and suggests an examination by a learning expert. The examination of Laura's skills is not conducted explicitly, but rather in a secretive way. However, although staff attempt to be subtle ('whispering'), I am doubtful to what extent they succeed in this. The first incident ends with Laura being taken out of the classroom, which marks her as different from the rest of the P2 group, and the class in general.

In the light of this examination, which labels Laura's academic skills as problematic, the children's subsequent conversation about 'playing racing' can be interpreted as related. 'Racing' is a popular activity with the P2 group, because it is both a maths resource and an entertaining game. However, there is a strong competitive element to it, as the game inevitably ends with winners and losers. And indeed, other fieldwork observations have showed that Laura generally tends to lose in this game. Thus, when confronted with playing it now, she appears to be weighing up being part of the

game against highlighting her academic difficulties and the experience of losing, and decides to exclude herself from the game. She makes this decision even though it upsets her so much that she begins to cry. This suggests that the presumably humiliating or shameful experience of (repeatedly) losing the game is even worse than not being able to play at all. The other children accept Laura's refusal to play as a matter of fact and with an apparent absence of empathy, indicating that this might not be the first time that this happens (in fact, Krystle and Eleanor have played it 13 times already just on that day). They appear quite untouched by Laura being upset, suggesting that they do not perceive the situation as unjust and in need of their intervention (for example, by comforting Laura or by suggesting an alternative game).

This incident brings to mind Ridge's (2002) finding that children often exclude themselves from activities such as school trips due to limited economic resources. However, it shows that such processes of self-exclusion may be more subtle, and not necessarily depend on economic but also on cultural dimensions of social class. Laura's academic problems could be related to a number of factors, such as particular learning difficulties, or her level of maturity. While presumably not one factor alone can be held responsible for her school performance, other observations during my fieldwork (such as on homevisits, as discussed in Chapter 5) suggest that social class does play a part in it.

Therefore, Laura's experiences in this excerpt, and her difficult standing in the triad relationship, can be seen as shaped by the complex intersection of age, gender, social class and other dimensions of difference. Age, and being part of the P2 group in this composite P1/2 class, also means that additional pressures arise for Laura: The five P2 children are generally held up as role models in terms of learning and behaviour in the classroom, and Laura's academic problems stigmatise her even more in this context, since she is not able to keep up with her advanced group as expected. The example thus illustrates a complex link between academic performance, emotional experiences and social status and relationships in the classroom.

The importance of the advanced skills for the P2 group status also becomes salient in the following dialogue. The teacher is just doing reading exercises with the P1 group, when she suddenly begins to loudly praise Claire (a P1 pupil) for knowing what ‘speech marks’ are. The five P2 children sit at a different table and discuss this:

Eleanor: Wow, a P1 that knows speech marks, that’s amazing.

Laura and Krystle agree.

Patrick: Her mum and dad have taught her that.

He sounds a bit angry, as if he doesn’t see why such a big deal should be made of it.

I say: Maybe.

Patrick: Yeah, I know her mum and dad must have taught her that, otherwise she wouldn’t know it.

The P2 girls turn back to their jotters.

Patrick still looks over to the P1s and now says to me: That’s not right.

I ask: Why?

Patrick, now sounding outraged: You’re supposed to learn speech marks in school. (He pauses.) You’re supposed to learn drawing at home, and how to get dressed and stuff, it’s not fair.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 13 March 2012]

In this situation, Patrick emphasises the importance of the distinction between P1 and P2 pupils and its value. He possibly feels threatened in his status as a more knowledgeable P2 pupil by Claire closing the gap – the P2 pupils have not long ago learned about ‘speech marks’ themselves. However, he is also very aware that children’s achievements in school are dependent on varying degrees of parental support, and judges these different conditions as unfair. His statement implies that he has acquired his academic knowledge the ‘right’ way, namely through school, and this puts him at a disadvantage in relation to children who learn academic skills at home. Indeed the literature has showed a link between parents’ social class, their

involvement in their children's education, and their children's educational outcomes (Raffo et al., 2007). This excerpt shows that Patrick is highly aware of these links and outcomes. In fact, his statements, and his emotional (angry, outraged) defence of what constitutes 'fairness' in this case, could be interpreted as an expression of the kind of 'middle-class anxiety' that Vincent and Ball (2007: 1062) have identified in parents with a heightened sense of responsibility to reproduce their children's middle-class status.

These examples of how children experience academic pressures need to be seen in the light of the particular discourses around diversity described in Chapter 4. I have discussed how staff construct social class in ambivalent ways, by downplaying its significance and at the same time attempting to reduce classed differences by treating all children in the same way (section 4.3.4). However, this means that children's academic performances are often seen as individualised, and not necessarily within the complex context of their social backgrounds. In the case of both Laura's and Patrick's experiences described in this section, this means that children need to take on responsibility, and need to handle the arising relational and emotional difficulties, on their own. For Laura, this seems to produce a difficult standing within the group of the P2 children, and in particular the P2 girls. For Patrick, it appears to create pressures to perform, and a sense of unfairness about how children's performances in schools are judged. Thus, children's status in groups, such as dyads and triads, is closely linked to dimensions of social class, gender and age.

### **6.3.2 Othering**

Theorizations of social identities are often framed using the concept of 'othering', assuming a logic of 'I am me' because 'I am not the other' (Macnaughton and Davis, 2001). Research on young children's processes of othering has mainly focused on issues of ethnicity and 'race' (Macnaughton and Davis, 2001; Bundgaard and Gulløv, 2006; Devine and Kelly, 2006; Wright, 2010; Theodorou, 2011). Indeed, my observations in Greenstone Primary also confirmed that dimensions of ethnicity (e.g. nationality, cultural practices, language) were often salient in processes of othering.

The following description of an argument in the classroom illustrates the salience of his non-British ethnicity for Patrick, whose family has moved to Scotland from the USA:

Patrick is having a quarrel with some of the other children over the use of Lego blocks in the construction area.

Suddenly he shouts: You're not my best friend!

It is not clear who this is directed at, maybe at Joshua, who is standing next to him.

Joshua says: That's not nice!

He sounds hurt.

The other children around murmur and seem indignant over Patrick's drastic statement.

Patrick shouts: No one in the United Kingdom is my best friend right now!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 December 2011]

After having an argument with a group of children, Patrick calls someone 'not his best friend'. It appears that the conflict has developed between Patrick and a group of other children, and potentially his statement refers to all of them, rather than just one person. Indeed, the children all express some outrage and seem to collectively take offense at his behaviour, leaving him standing isolated. Joshua, in particular, expresses his hurt through Patrick's comment. Patrick reacts by distancing himself even further, stating that 'no one in the United Kingdom' is his best friend. Rather than attempting to reconcile with the group, he alienates himself by 'othering' the rest of the group – or himself. Even in his moment of rage, however, he limits his statement temporally to 'right now', leaving the possibility of reconciliation open.

Even though the situation did not involve any discussion of ethnicity or nationality, Patrick draws on these dimensions of his social identity in order to stress the differences between him and the rest of the class. This points towards the significance that not being from the United Kingdom, seems to have for his sense of social identity and belonging. The fact that he foregrounds ethnicity or nationality

can also be interpreted as related to the discourses on diversity in Greenstone Primary. Since nationality is among the dimensions of ethnicity which are often highlighted in this discourse, he may see it as a legitimate marker of and explanation for disidentifications and disagreements.

This and other incidents of ‘othering’ that I observed during my fieldwork illustrate how othering involves the foregrounding of particular aspects of social identity. From an intersectional perspective, people’s social identities and forms of belonging are multifaceted, and the salience of dimensions of difference varies (Anthias, 1998; 2001; Yuval-Davis, 2011). In the above case, Patrick foregrounds ethnicity/nationality (‘nobody in the United Kingdom’). It is unlikely that the conflict was actually about being or not being in the United Kingdom, but nevertheless Patrick in this case decides to foreground this aspect of his social identity over other aspects or reasons for the conflict.

Being an ‘other’ is often invested with feelings of strangeness or weirdness. Such moments of othering included, for example, when the whole class broke into an agitated discussion when Patrick mentioned that he does not have a TV at home, when children had ‘unusual’ foods for lunch, or when children took on unpopular roles in play. Therefore, it became apparent that processes of othering rely on assumptions about what constitutes ‘norms’:

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are intertwined with concepts of normality and otherness, the latter framed in the context of the norms and expectations that structure social interaction within the society at large. (Devine and Kelly, 2006: 129)

By marking or muting certain aspects of difference, the discourses around diversity at Greenstone Primary construct, explicitly and implicitly, what counts as ‘normality’. Children who stand outside that ‘normality’ may come to be invested with feelings of oddness or weirdness, and these feelings are not just a consequence but also contribute to the very processes of ‘othering’. The following section outlines how such emotional investments come to adhere to certain children, and mark them as being different in particular ways.

### **6.3.3 Emotions that ‘stick’**

A popular game on the playground is ‘duck duck goose’, played in the following way: a group of children sits in a circle; one child stands at the centre and turns around, pointing at each of the children in turn, and calling them ‘duck, duck, duck...’. When he or she finally points at one child and shouts ‘goose!’, everyone speeds away and the ‘goose’ has to chase and catch one of the other children. During the fieldwork I have observed or joined this game many times, and remained fascinated by this construction of difference, the arbitrariness and powerfulness of ascribing roles, and the ways in which individual children dealt differently with the stigma of being ‘the goose’.

A similarly playground game was playing ‘tag’, in which one person, who ‘is it’, has to chase the other children around the playground and ‘tag’ them with an invisible label which causes the tagged person to ‘be it’. I observed that some children were embracing and even enjoying the role ‘being it’, whereas others assumed it reluctantly or tearfully, or refused to assume it altogether, even if this meant the interruption of the game and scolding from others. Certainly there are many dynamics at play in such situations – such as personal preferences and traits, physical aptitude, relationships, histories etc. – and it is impossible to give a final explanation of why individual children perform the game in a certain way. In this section I look at this phenomenon of embracing, refusing or being stuck with certain roles by using Ahmed’s (2004a; 2004b) concept of the ‘stickiness’ of emotions. According to Ahmed, the way in which identities and collectivities are constructed is both deeply relational and emotional. She conceives of emotions not as something that comes from ‘within’ an individual, and then moves outwards to others – people, objects – but as something that shapes the very distinction between ‘individual’ and ‘collective’, and between ‘psychic’ and ‘social’ (Ahmed, 2004a: 27). Particular emotions directed at certain objects, groups or individuals come to ‘stick’ to them, and shape how they are constructed.



This 'stickiness', illustrated quite literally in the act of 'tagging' someone during games of tag, becomes even more evident in the following example of a playground game involving the construction of multiple roles:

On the playground, Evie and Claire come up to me and ask if I want to play with them. Evie says she is 'the maid', Claire 'the princess' and I can be 'the queen'.

I say: Okay.

Evie explains to me that we have to find the 'missing princesses', who are Tahira, Catherine and Brenda. I don't think those three are aware of the game.

We start looking for them around the playground and the game turns into a game of tag, with us trying to catch the 'missing princesses'. The girls seem to have a lot of fun.

After a bit, Evie comes to me. She looks unhappy and says in an urgent tone: Marlies, can I be the queen now?

I say: Yes.

She says: You can be the maid if you want?

I say: Okay.

We continue the same game, but with swapped roles.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 19 March 2012]

What starts off as a form of role play turns into a game of tag with additional meanings attached to the various roles in the game. Evie initiates and creates the game, and it seems that she makes up and changes the rules as she goes along, a dynamic that is quite common to children's playground games. Evie begins by handing out the highly gendered and classed roles of maid, princess and queen. Also age might be seen as a relevant factor in distributing the roles: I may have been given the role of queen due to my age, and related status and authority. The roles of princesses and queens are extremely popular with many girls in the class. Especially princesses seem to symbolize the intersections between femininity, youth, beauty, affluence and power. The 'missing princesses' that 'need to be caught' may reflect the girls' tensions between wanting to be free and independent, on the one hand, and

wanting to be desired, coveted and protected, on the other hand. Evie chooses the role of maid for herself and this fits with my observations of her sometimes performing the role of a tomboy, refusing feminised images. However, after a while she wants to exchange the label of ‘maid’ with the one of ‘queen’, even though this doesn’t change her task in the game – she is still catching the missing princesses. This suggests that the role of ‘maid’, in its classed and gendered quality, has become undesirable for her – it has become sticky with negative emotions: she seems ‘unhappy’ and I have the feeling that she wants to get rid of the role with some ‘urgency’. This ‘stickiness’ is intensified over the following days as the children develop the game further:

A cluster of girls from my class stand in a corner and I join them. Tahira is the leader today, she stands on a wooden bench, with the other girls around her on the ground, and she is just distributing roles. She decides who can be a princess – but all the girls want to be princesses.

Tahira says: Okay, some people will need to do two jobs!

I ask: What’s the other job?

Tahira says: A servant!

Tahira first tells Asya, then Amy, to be a servant, but they almost start to cry, so she allows them to be princesses.

It almost seems that the game cannot be started. Then Claire volunteers to be the servant, and Tahira shouts: Okay, you have to clean!

Evie says she will be a maid too.

The game starts, and the maids/servants have to catch the princesses.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 20 March 2012]

The following day, Tahira has taken ownership of the game. I have regularly observed her to assume powerful roles of ordering others around during my fieldwork, and, also in this case, she asserts her position with such confidence and authority that it is not being questioned. Her standing ‘above’ the others is even expressed through her physically elevated position. By now, the role of the maid has

become sticky with unpopularity, presumably due to its classed and gendered inferiority as well as the intersection with the stigmatised role of 'being it' in the game of tag. Since everybody wants to be a princess, Tahira offers a compromise of doing 'two jobs', but to the children the roles of princess and maid seem irreconcilable within one person. Tahira also changes the role of 'maid' to that of 'servant', and by connecting it with the concrete task of cleaning she distances it from the fairytale world and converges it with a real-world context of classed inferiority and degradation. In fact, the 'maid/servant' has now become so sticky with negative emotions – disgust, fear, shame, humiliation? – that Asya and Amy almost cry when threatened with it. Finally, in order to save the game, Claire volunteers to be a servant, and Evie joins her in being a maid. By saving the game, Claire's performance of the servant is invested with dignity, and this is consolidated when Evie teams up with her. Through assuming an honourable role by saving the game, by embracing it voluntarily with their heads held high and by forming a team, Evie and Claire manage to transform the sticky role of the maid into an acceptable one.

However, over the next days it becomes clear that voluntarily assuming the role of maid has a time-limit even for Evie and Claire. It seems to be acceptable to assume the role in single and exceptional circumstances, but not permanently – this would prevent them from being able to *control* the stickiness. As a solution to this problem, the children start to ask me to perform the role of maid and catcher, which I agree to.

I go outside on the playground and I am immediately surrounded by 'the girls' again – Evie, Claire, Catherine, Brenda, Asya, Tahira.

They ask me if I want to be the maid, again.

I say okay, and what do I need to do.

Tahira explains to me that I have to catch the princesses, and also clean a bit.

Claire is the queen, who is telling me, the maid, what to do, and all others are princesses. The princesses sit on one of the benches and every now and then, all of a sudden, they giggle and run away in different directions.

Then Claire, the queen, shouts hysterically: The princesses, the princesses, Marlies, you have to go and get them!

And I run after the 'princesses', catch them and bring them back to the bench.

After a bit, Catherine decides she is a horse. A minute later, Evie decides she is a baby horse.

The two of them now also catch the princesses. I ask Catherine: So if you are a horse, are you on my side then?

Catherine: No, I am not a maid, I am a horse! I catch the princesses!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 22 March 2012]

A few days and breaks later, the leadership of the game has become more diffused. Tahira is still partly in charge, but Claire has taken on the role of the queen. It seems that the game has stalled in absence of a maid, and, over the last days, it has become common practice to ask me to assume it. As in other similar situations of the fieldwork, I had the feeling that the girls also enjoy exerting power over me in my role of an unusual adult, and take some pleasure in seeing me in roles that break down my adult authority. On my enquiry, I am told that I have to catch the princesses, and 'clean a bit'. However, over the last few days it has become clear that the 'cleaning' part of the maid role is just fictional: none of the maids have cleaned, or pretended to clean, anything, and it appears to serve only the purpose of qualifying the meaning of the maid further as undesirable. While my taking on the role of the maid seems to be a temporary solution, it is quite limiting to the game – I am stuck in the role of maid and catcher, and the girls are stuck in their roles of princesses and being caught, and the game becomes quite repetitive. Finally, Evie and Catherine find a way of changing their roles within the game without the attached emotional stickiness and loss of status, by introducing characters which are (yet) relatively neutral, or at least benign, in terms of their emotional investments, and in terms of their gendered and classed positions – horses (and, even more favourable, *baby* horses). This allows them to assume the roles of catching others while not being associated with the sticky label of the maid. Even though the horses share the task of catching princesses with the maid, Catherine makes it clear that she does not want to

be associated with the maid, and that she is not ‘on my side’. It also seems that Catherine and Evie have broken the strict rules of the game and opened new possibilities for everyone, since from this moment on, other children start to create their own animal roles as well.

Over the course of a few days, a new playground game has been created, changed and evolved, and finally transformed into a different game. Evie, who seems to have initiated the game, has at the beginning assumed the role of maid, suggesting that it had a positive connotation for her then. Indeed, many fairytales and stories, which also featured in the school context, portray the role of maids as virtuous and good. However, in the course of the game, the role of the maid quickly changes, as it is being constructed as inferior, and negative emotions directed at it come to ‘stick’ and render it objectionable and undesirable. Being involved in the game, and taking on the role of the maid, allowed me to feel these emotions myself: shame, humiliation, fear, disgust.

Through the perspective of Ahmed’s (2004b) framework, emotions attached to the maid, and other roles in the game, come to shape and define their boundaries and identities in relation to each other. Not only do the emotions define the roles within the game, but assuming a role also means that emotions attached to it may stick to the *person*, and define the person, beyond the game. At the same time, roles come to define and value individuals and *groups* beyond the game, i.e. groups with certain classed and gendered attributes. Although performed as a game, the above situations are not trivial, but can be seen as a ‘dramatic performance’ (Thorne, 1993: 5) of serious and power-infused social relations of social class and gender.

#### **6.3.4 Normative social identities: beyond ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’**

Processes of belonging and being different are closely linked to values and normative discourses, as the previous sections have shown: dynamics of ‘othering’ often serve to expose divergences from normative practices (Devine and Kelly, 2006), and

emotions have been described as key to how meanings and values are ascribed to objects, individuals and groups:

Affective responses ... not only create the borders between selves and others, but also 'give' others meaning and value in the very moment of apparent separation, a giving which temporarily fixes an other. (Ahmed, 2004a: 30)

In this section, I want to draw particular attention to how social identities, and feelings of belonging and being different, are invested with values and used to create dichotomies of 'goodies' and 'baddies'.

Primary schools have been described as spaces in which children's interactions, behaviours and emotions are highly regulated and controlled (Devine, 2002; Harden, 2012). My analysis so far has shown that, indeed, the institutional discourses around diversity in Greenstone Primary serve as a regulatory framework which highlights certain dimensions of children's social identities, and mutes others or constructs them in ambivalent ways, and thus promotes certain ways of being through normative assumptions and practices. Children's behaviours in Greenstone Primary are often regulated through a rhetoric of 'good' and 'bad' choices. Thus, although it is generally clear what kind of behaviour is expected from the children, there is an implication that children do have a 'choice' as to whether they meet such expectations or not. The rhetoric of 'choice' is used to distinguish between a child making a good or bad decision, and a child being inherently good or bad:

When discussing an incident in which some boys have broken school rules, the children shout: They have been bad boys!

The teacher explains: They have made bad choices, but they are not bad boys. We never call someone a bad person, just because they make bad choices.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 8 March 2012]

Arguably, this distinction can be seen as only a rhetorical one, since – if using Ahmed's (2004a; 2004b) concept of 'stickiness' – the label 'bad' does indeed come to stick to the individual person, or groups ('bad boys'). However, the staff's

distinction between ‘bad children’ and ‘bad choices’ also serves to stress children’s agency in relation to their behaviours in school: the meritocratic system in school is based on the assumption that everyone can, if they only *want to*, achieve the same outcomes. This discourse is used to motivate and compel the children to certain behaviours, and is reduced to practice through complex systems of rewards and disciplining (e.g. ‘good choices’ are awarded with stickers and certificates; and both ‘good’ and ‘bad’ choices can result in being sent to the head teacher and receiving a letter to the parents). However, it appears that this promotion of children’s agency – to make ‘good’ or ‘bad’ choices – is based on an understanding of it as intentional (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008) and self-directed (Valentine, 2011), rather than as embedded within complex and ambivalent contexts. This discourse also implies a strict dichotomy between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, which, as I show in this section, neglects the intersectional complexities through which children perform what they perceive as being ‘good’.

The discourse of ‘good and bad choices’ leads to an almost constant sense of responsibility and reflection on the part of many children on the ‘morality’ of their actions. An example is the following discussion among Krystle, Eleanor, Patrick, Aamil and Laura:

The five are discussing if ‘hate’ is a swear word.

Krystle (very convinced): Hate is a swear word. ‘Cause if you, like, say to someone: I hate you, they’re gonna be hurt. It’s not nice to say ‘hate’, right Marlies?

Yes, I say.

Eleanor nods. Laura doesn’t say anything.

Patrick protests loudly: No, hate is not a swear word!!

Krystle and Eleanor shout: Yes it is!!

Laura doesn’t seem too bothered by the discussion and is focusing on her task. She seems quite indifferent.

Aamil is pondering over which side to take.

He looks at me and says: Marlies, is hate a swear word?

Now all five look at me.

I think for a moment – they have been told by the teacher that they are not allowed to use the word ‘hate’, and I don’t want to undermine her. I say: I would say it depends on how you use it.

Patrick says triumphantly: See!

And he grins at Krystle and Eleanor.

They feel confirmed in their opinion too though and nod: Yes!

Eleanor says: You could for example say, I hate Brussels sprouts.

They all say yes, and I say yes too.

Now all of them start to giggle: Oh I hate Brussels sprouts, they’re disgusting!

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 20 December 2011]

The discussion illustrates how the children negotiate their behaviours, language and emotions within the regulatory discourse of the primary school. On another occasion, the teacher has banned the word ‘hate’ from the classroom. Presumably, this referred to a conflict or incident of bullying in which someone may have expressed their ‘hatred’ of someone else. However, banning the word now results in a complex and heated discussion on what language is permissible, and, by extension, also questions the acceptability of certain emotions. The children have their own opinions on this, but – within the strongly regulated context of the school – they question their own assessments and seem to rely on my (adult) judgement.

It is noticeable that the girls, Krystle and Eleanor, advocate a stronger censorship of the word ‘hate’ than Patrick. This is in line with my own observations and findings from the literature (e.g. Thorne, 1993) that girls are often more compliant with teachers’ expectations. Furthermore, swearing may be considered a rough, hegemonic masculine behaviour (Connell, 1995) from which Eleanor and Krystle want to distance themselves in order to assert their feminine identities. Thorne (1993) also observed that boys like to make and question rules and collectively break them



more often than girls. As in this example, the ways in which being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ are being constructed in the school context are often highly gendered. This resonates with existing research which observed girls to be constructed as nice, good, obedient, gentle etc. and boys as rough, troublesome, disobedient or bad (Renold, 2001a; 2004; 2005; Browne, 2004; Connolly, 2004; Konstantoni, 2011).

The children contributed to this binary construction of ‘bad boys’ and ‘good girls’ on many occasions. For example, when a boy from another class climbed onto the wall to the neighbour’s garden during break time, staff used the incident to point out that this was bad and risky behaviour that should not be copied. The incident concerned the children in the P1/2 class so much that some of them decided to develop a play for the weekly assembly. The gist of the play was summarised by Patrick: ‘We will make a play. The boys will do something wrong, and then you (pointing at the girls) will come and tell us how to do it right!’ (excerpt from fieldnotes, 6 December 2011). The teacher allowed the children to use some class time for developing the play (although it was never performed in the end), but did not challenge the normative gender binary.

However, the above discussion about using the word ‘hate’ cannot be reduced to gendered dynamics alone. Laura does not seem to be interested in the debate, and Aamil appears to be looking for a more differentiated answer. Thus, the way in which children invest their social identities with values is more complex. Particularly boys often perform their identities as ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ in ambivalent ways. Some boys liked to deliberately assume the role of ‘baddy’, such as in the following example:

On the playground, Joshua asks me: Are we playing Star Wars now?

I planned this with him earlier so I say yes.

I ask Joshua how it works. He says there are good guys and baddies and they just fight each other.

I ask: How?

He says: They are just shooting at each other.

He wants to be a bad guy, Darth Vader.

He says I should be the good guy – but my role is not further specified.

We pretend to shoot each other, running around on the playground, for the next minutes.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 26 January 2012]

The world of goodies and baddies, for Joshua and many other boys in the class, is infused with characters from fictional worlds. In this example, Star Wars serves as the inspiration for the roles of good and bad. Stories of superheroes, particularly Superman, Batman and Spiderman, were particularly positive roles of ‘goodies’, but also offered a variety of attractive roles of ‘baddies’. These narratives are present in the children’s lives through media, mostly TV, and merchandising products (toys, clothes, lunch bags, schoolbags etc.), and therefore also have a consumerist dimension. Stories such as from Star Wars or of superheroes are popular almost exclusively with boys, presumably due to the fact that their characters are generally male and they appeal to masculine ideas of strength, power, honour etc. Generally, the boys seemed to prefer the roles of ‘goodies’, presumably because they are portrayed as superior in these stories. When I asked Gabriel, for example, why he liked Spiderman so much, he answered: ‘Because he fights the baddies and because he can wrap them up with cobwebs!’ (excerpt from fieldnotes, 13 December 2011). However, many boys also often assumed the roles of ‘baddies’ on purpose, such as in the above case of Joshua embracing the role of Darth Vader, presumably due to the power and roughness associated with such roles (Konstantoni, 2011). Embracing the role of ‘baddy’ in a context where being ‘good’ is constantly portrayed as the ‘right’ choice also means to resist, or subvert, dominant discourses in school, and can thus be seen as a particular agonistic form of performing masculinity.

While the fight between ‘good’ and ‘evil’ appeared to be intrinsic to many different ways of performing masculinity, many girls seemed to prefer more ‘harmonious’ games. On one occasion, for example, when setting up some plastic animals for playing with the farm in the classroom, Alba defined the starting conditions for everyone involved in the game: ‘We’re playing all good and no bad ones, okay?’

(excerpt from fieldnotes, 13 January 2012), meaning that all the animal characters would be ‘good’ and there had to be no fighting.

In addition to gender, age was often another factor that came into play when discussing ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviours:

Patrick: When you’re a little boy, you’re kind of like so nice, but when you’re a teenager, you start getting, you’re... if you’re gonna be a baddie when you grow up, when you’re a little boy you’re kind of nice, and when you’re a teenager, you’re kind of, are starting to get greedy, and want your house all to yourself, so you start thinking about buying guns... and then, when you’re a grown-up you start shooting people and stealing.

[Interview excerpt, 30 April 2012]

In this situation, we were talking about whether it is important in ‘what kind of house’ someone lives (a discussion that arose when reading Anthony Brown’s (1997) picture book ‘Voices in the Park’), when Patrick began to talk about ‘decisions’ that people make on how to live their lives. In this excerpt, Patrick draws on common social discourses of childhood innocence (James and Prout, 1997) as opposed to ideas about unruly, antisocial youth (Flatley et al., 2008; Davidson, 2013). He presents a narrative of moral decline, with little boys being ‘so nice’, teenagers starting to become ‘greedy’, and adults, finally, ‘shooting people and stealing’. He does, however, qualify that this narrative is only valid for those people who are ‘gonna be a baddie when they grow up’, and thus suggests that growing up is not necessarily leading to delinquency. Patrick’s statement is linked to gendered and age-related ideas about moral discourses of ‘being good’. In the continuing discussion, he differentiates this discourse further by drawing on classed dimensions of good and bad behaviours:

Patrick: Poor people can actually turn into bad people.

Marlies: Poor people?

Patrick: Yeah, cause they start stealing ... the boys. When they ate all the food they have they start being really greedy, because they only have water, and they start being greedier

and greedier, until they just can't resist to going down and stealing.

[Interview excerpt from fieldnotes, 30 April 2012]

In addition to gender and age, Patrick also adds social class as a factor for whether people are 'good' or 'bad'. He argues that disadvantaged social positions may lead to delinquency – out of necessity – and place 'poor people' at risk of 'turning into bad people'. He differentiates that people may become 'bad' due to their life circumstances, but the statement also reflects a negative stigmatization of lower social classes: poverty will inevitably lead to being 'greedier and greedier', weakness ('they just can't resist to stealing') and corrupt moral behaviour. This is in contrast to the portrayal of poverty in stories and fairytales (such as in the pantomime of 'The Beauty and the Beast', which the class went to see) and in discussing fair-trade and global inequality as part of the curriculum, where poverty is portrayed as a virtuous, honest but exploited state. His statement resonates with recent negative social and media discourses about anti-social, criminal behaviours of the 'underclass' youths.

Patrick's reference to 'buying guns' as a normalized dimension of 'turning bad' may be related to particular discourses on private gun ownership in US America, his family's country of origin. Indeed, ethnic and cultural backgrounds shape what is considered good and bad behaviour, and research now widely recognises that cultural contexts frame moral lives (Wainryb, 2006) and that children develop social and moral concepts by participating in cultural interactions (Turiel, 1983). The following is an example of how belonging to various groups produces specific demands on what constitutes 'good' behaviours for children:

In the classroom, Fatima winks at me.

She says: Can you do that?

I wink back, not very well, and say: I can't do it very well.

We are both smiling.

Then her face suddenly turns all serious.

She says: I'm not allowed to do that.

I say, surprised: Why not?

She says: 'Cause Urdu people are not allowed.

She says it with a serious, almost fearful expression, as if she had just realised that she has infringed an important rule.

I say: Why not?

She says, whispering now: It's really bad for us.

Later, in an internet search, I find that according to some interpretations of the Quran a wink at a woman is seen as offensive as it can be interpreted as a sexual advance.

[Excerpt from fieldnotes, 27 January 2012]

Fatima's reference to 'us', the 'Urdu people', indicates that she refers to her ethnic and possibly religious belonging, which has specific implications for what counts as 'good' behaviour for her. In retrospect, I wonder if Fatima's initial 'Can you do that?' was asked to enquire whether I was *allowed* to wink in my culture, rather than *able* to do it. I was left feeling slightly uncomfortable about having interacted with Fatima in a way that she deemed highly inappropriate, although she does not seem to resent me for it. In fact, Fatima seems quite aware of cultural differences which regulate good behaviour and knows that she needs to explain these differences. Her 'us' implies a 'you', or 'them', representing mine and the school's cultural mainstream, and highlights the constant need for her negotiation of differences between normative demands of different contexts.

The examples in this section have illustrated the significance of the discourse of 'good' and 'bad' choices, which implies dichotomous ways of being – either being good *or* bad. However, a close look at the processes of establishing what being 'good' and 'bad' means, shows that these processes are highly dependent on gender, age, social class, and ethnic backgrounds. The school's discourse of being 'good' draws on particular gendered, classed and cultural norms. For example, the dichotomy of 'good girls' and 'bad boys' often goes unchallenged by staff, and practices outlined in previous chapters, such as the 'snack list', have shown the prevalence of classed assumptions about 'good choices'. Thus, while the institutional

discourse in Greenstone Primary implies a dichotomy of being ‘good’ or ‘bad’, children need to negotiate their belonging to multiple groups in order to perform their own ways of being ‘good’, which may or may not be in line with the school’s norms.

## 6.4 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have used an intersectional lens in order to explore the children's complex identities of belonging and being different. I have drawn attention to the role of emotions in how social identities and groups come to be invested with meanings and values, and to the subtle interpersonal relationships (e.g. dyads and triads, family relationships) which intersect with classed, gendered and ethnic forms of belonging and being different.

As outlined at the beginning of this Chapter, I have conceptualised belonging and being different not as separable, but as both always involving the other (Jenkins, 2008). Paying attention to the intersections in children's social identities meant to recognise that belonging and being different can be ambivalent and contradictory, since children may at the same time belong, and be different, through the multiple aspects of their social identities. Through this intersectional lens I have sought to draw attention to

the doing of the relation between categories, the outcome of this doing and how this doing results in either troubled or untroubled subject positions. (Staunæs, 2003: 105)

In section 6.2.1 I have highlighted the importance of the socio-spatial, and showed how children construct their belonging to different places through different emotional attachments. Family relationships played a key role here, as well as dimensions of ethnicity and social class. Children also contribute to complex power-relations by engaging in 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis, 2011), by establishing boundaries around certain groups and social identities, and constructing certain forms of belonging as homogeneous in order to exclude others. Thus, belonging is a mutual, and often politicized process, that involves both identifying with, and being identified with, people, groups or places. In section 6.2.2, I have showed how forms of belonging are constructed through the children's personal and emotional investments in particular discursive positions. Thus, the meaning of belonging to particular groups, for example in the case of Evie's 'being Scottish', can take on

highly personalised forms, and may differ for different children. Section 6.2.3 has discussed the chasms that some children experience between life at school – and in Scotland more widely? – and their belonging to different spaces and communities. The section showed again that belonging can be complex – based on ethnicity, country of origin, religious, cultural and socio-economic practices – yet forms of belonging are constructed by the children often in dichotomous ways, contrasting the different ‘worlds’ they need to balance, and their present versus their ‘real’ places.

In section 6.3.1 I have drawn attention to the importance of dyadic and triadic friendship groups, and the difficult and upsetting experiences that may result for children, like Laura, who are part of a triad, but excluded from a dyad (Krystle and Eleanor). Using this example, I have showed that multiple dynamics and pressures, in relation to academic achievement, classed and cultural backgrounds, age etc., intersect with the ways in which friendship groups are formed and performed. In section 6.3.2 I have discussed an example of ‘othering’ as a process of establishing differences. I have explored how processes of othering tend to construct certain ways of being as strange and weird, by contrasting it with the ‘normal’ (Devine and Kelly, 2006). In processes of othering, children foreground certain dimensions of difference over others. Section 6.3.3 has illustrated how social identities are performed through play. Drawing on a game of role-play tag with a number of girls, I have showed how emotions come to ‘stick’ to certain roles and identities, and in doing so shape their meanings and values (Ahmed, 2004a; 2004b). In section 6.3.4, finally, I have drawn attention to how social identities, and feelings of belonging and being different, are invested with normative values. Staff in Greenstone Primary employ a rhetoric of ‘good and bad choices’ through which children are expected to regulate their behaviour. The analysis of the discourses around diversity in Chapter 4 has showed that staff’s assumptions about what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are shaped by gendered, classed and cultural values. In this section I have showed that the children’s meanings of being ‘good’ or ‘bad’ are also negotiated at the intersections of gendered, classed, ethnic and age identities, and thus far more complex than the dichotomy of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ implied in the school discourse. What it means to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ differs for different children, depending on their intersecting social



identities and belongings, and their meanings may be in conflict with dominant normative discourses in the school and may be beyond the scope of 'choice'. Thus, the concept of agency in the context of children's behaviour 'choices' needs to be seen as situated within the particular context of the school, and at the intersections of their multiple social identities.

The examples in this Chapter have showed that there are significant differences in the ways in which children take on, transform or refuse certain identities. In performing their social identities, children draw on a range of discourses that are available to them, and on multiple occasions throughout this Chapter I have linked my analysis back to the discourses on diversity in Greenstone Primary, as discussed in Chapter 4. These discourses foreground certain social identity categories, namely certain dimensions of ethnicity (language, cultural practices, food). While such dimensions were indeed often foregrounded by the children in examples in this Chapter, the children perform and resist the school's discourses by drawing on a range of intersecting social identities which may produce complex tensions.

What ultimately causes each child to 'choose' their position within such discourses depends on a range of factors, and there can be no final 'certainty of interpretation' (Frosh et al., 2003: 52). I have showed in this Chapter that emotions play a key role in how social identities and groups are invested with meaning and values, and result in complex dynamics of belonging and being different. Ways of performing social identities depend on children's personal and emotional investments in discursive positions and their relationships with others. Therefore, this Chapter has showed the significance of emotions for 'interweaving the personal with the social' (Ahmed, 2004a: 28), and for children's experiences of belonging and being different in the discursive context of the primary school and beyond.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this final Chapter I provide a summary of the findings of this research by revisiting and answering the research questions. I discuss the implications of this study for debates about understanding children's social identities, children's agency, and about working with an intersectional lens in order to explore social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in situated contexts. This is followed by implications for policy and practice as well as for future research, and, finally, some concluding reflections.

### 7.1 Summarising findings and answering the research questions

Based on the gaps identified in the relevant literature, it was the aim of this study to explore how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of a primary school. I have investigated this focus through an ethnographic study with 5-7 year-old children in a P1/2 class in a diverse urban Scottish primary school, which addressed the following research questions:

**Research question 1:** How are the ways in which children perform their social class, gender and ethnic identities situated within and framed by the institutional setting (including relationships with staff), the policy and legislation context and wider social inequalities?

**Research question 2:** How do complex aspects of children's social identities intersect? What aspects of children's social identities are foregrounded or remain silent, and what tensions arise in this process?

These research questions have guided my discussion and analysis throughout this thesis and cannot be reduced to individual chapters. In describing and analysing the

context of this research, Chapter 4 has contributed to the first research question. The substantive Chapters 5 and 6 have mainly addressed research question 2, but have also contributed to question 1 through a continuing concern for the relevance of context, relationships and wider social inequalities. My research strategy throughout was guided by the theoretical concepts of intersectionality, viewing social identities as performed, and a focus on emotions and values. I now turn to summarise the findings of this study by answering each research question in turn.

**Research question 1:** How are the ways in which children perform their social class, gender and ethnic identities situated within and framed by the institutional setting (including relationships with staff), the policy and legislation context and wider social inequalities?

Drawing on West and Fenstermaker (1995), in Chapter 3 I maintained that meanings can never be determined outside of the contexts in which they are constructed. This is in line with ethnographers' views that the context of research fundamentally impacts on the research process, and co-constructs the children (and adults') experiences within it in particular ways (James, 2007). Therefore, I have explored the policy and institutional context of this research in-depth in Chapter 4 and made reference to the discourses, practices, relationships and wider social inequalities that frame the children's social identities in Greenstone Primary throughout Chapters 5 and 6. In doing so, this study has highlighted the importance of paying close attention to the research context and the ways in which it frames participants' lives and experiences.

Greenstone Primary is located within a neighbourhood that is characterised by a high diversity in terms of social class and ethnicity. The school is gender-mixed, although in the particular class of this study the number of girls outweighed the number of boys. Discourses and practices around 'diversity' in Greenstone Primary are shaped by this particular neighbourhood context, mainly in terms of the school's self-characterisation as a 'multicultural' school in response to the high ethnic diversity.

Policy and legislation documents on a global, UK, Scottish, local authority and school level construct difference and diversity in various, sometimes ambivalent ways. Different documents prioritise certain categories of difference, e.g. the Equality Act (2010) neglects social class but includes gender and ‘race’/ethnicity as protected characteristics. Many Scottish policies, on the other hand, tend to address social class inequalities but have been criticized for neglecting issues of gender (Forbes et al., 2011). In policies and legislation, intersecting dimensions of discrimination have been recognised only by the Equality Act 2010 (although described as insufficient and ineffective (Solanke, 2011)), and are relatively absent from Scottish policies. Moreover, a tension between the terminology of ‘celebrating diversity’, on the one hand, and ‘tackling inequality’, on the other hand, can be identified in Scottish policies, along with a lack of clarity on how these concepts are defined.

Staff at Greenstone Primary ‘activate’ (Smith, 2005a) these policies and legislations to different extents and in different ways by considering and incorporating them into the discourses and practices around ‘diversity’ in the school context. This generates particular discourses on diversity through which social class, gender and ethnicity are constructed in complex and ambivalent ways. Staff at Greenstone Primary generally use a rhetoric of ‘celebrating diversity’, which is implemented via multicultural (and some elements of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory) practices which mainly emphasise certain dimensions of ethnicity (language, food customs, cultural and religious traditions). At the same time, this construction of diversity mutes other aspects of ethnicity, such as skin colour. Social class and gender are constructed in ambivalent ways in staff’s discourses and practices. Staff are aware of social class differences, and their potential impact on children’s access to systems of support and participation (e.g. ‘going to the theatre’), but are also worried about stigmatising children through classed assumptions and therefore attempt to address social class differences by ‘treating everyone the same’. However, this can result in individualised notions of aspects of social class, e.g. when children are held personally responsible for bringing in ‘unhealthy’ snacks. Gender often appeared to be a taken-for-granted, self-evident dimension of diversity, and – maybe because of

this – was neither particularly muted nor celebrated, but often foregrounded in implicit or explicit ways, and rarely problematized.

The ways in which diversity and differences are constructed are dependent on staff's situated decisions on which aspects of difference to foreground, and shaped by values and normative assumptions about what constitutes children's 'best interests'. Discourses on diversity mute, mark or normalise dimensions of social class, gender and ethnicity in complex and ambivalent ways and this reflects tensions and silences in policies and legislation, between 'celebrating diversity', on the one hand, and 'tackling inequality', on the other hand. A lack of clarity on these terms, their meanings and implications for practice means that staff often rely on a 'multicultural' discourse which neglects wider social and economic power relations (May, 1999; Vandebroek, 2007). It also means that the different underlying dimensions of social justice in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity (in terms of recognition, redistribution, and representation (Fraser, 1997; 2008)) are not addressed.

While the main focus of this research was on children's social identities, it also highlighted how through performing certain social identities, wider social inequalities become manifest. Relationships, interactions and practices in the primary school do not happen in isolation from their wider social, economic, policy and legislative context. This context generates particular discourses in school which frame the children's social identities and are mediated by staff's values and situated decisions. Although staff employ some elements of anti-discriminatory practice, equality and social justice are often sought to be promoted through a discourse of 'treating everyone the same'. However, children are still aware of and contribute to powerful discourses of social stereotypes and inequalities. For example, children hold views which normalise gender inequalities ('boys are better than girls and therefore have greater entitlement'), racial segregation ('people should live together by skin colour') and classed normative lifestyle choices ('eating "good" brands of yogurt'). Children also engage in the 'politics of belonging' (Yuval-Davis, 2011) by constructing dynamics of 'us' and 'them', engaging in processes of 'othering', and drawing boundaries around certain forms of belonging in order to exclude others

(e.g. if someone does not speak Urdu they are not ‘allowed’ to claim a Pakistani identity). Different social identities sit differently within these processes. Some ways of performing social identities may privilege children, for example by allowing them to ‘fit in’ and comply with the school’s expectations in terms of classed, gendered and ethnic ways of being. Other social identities may disadvantage children, for example when being excluded on the basis of not wearing the ‘right’ classed and gendered clothes, or when not being able to comply with pressures of academic performance.

These complexities show how the fact that institutional discourses around diversity did not address these inequalities, did not make them disappear, but rather, often left them unchallenged and persistent in the children’s lives. This also indicates that despite their efforts to create equal and socially just environments, schools are not isolated from wider structural inequalities and therefore need to be places in which these inequalities are actively acknowledged and challenged.

Particularly in the current political context of austerity, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments, as discussed in the introduction, schools play a crucial part in countering discriminatory and divisive social attitudes. As part of this, it is important that schools are environments in which *all* aspects of children’s identities are valued and promoted. This research has shown that some children indeed experience chasms between ‘different worlds’ or distinguish clearly between ‘in and out of school stuff’ (e.g. in relation to ‘what happens at the mosque’), and it is therefore important that educational institutions address and challenge these divisions in order not to marginalise some aspects of children’s identities, or particular groups of children.

**Research question 2:** How do complex aspects of children’s social identities intersect? What aspects of children’s social identities are foregrounded or remain silent, and what tensions arise in this process?

The analysis in this study has showed that social class, gender and ethnicity intersect in complex ways in the children’s performing of their social identities. Particular

social identities are foregrounded in specific moments and situations (Valentine, 2007), yet it is difficult if not impossible to ever reduce the performing of social identities to either social class *or* gender *or* ethnicity alone. In addition, age, sexuality and interpersonal relationships (e.g. dynamics of ‘best friends’, conflicts between dyadic and triadic groups, family relationships) all intersected within children’s social identities in particular moments. Thus, social identities need to be understood as deeply contextual, relational, and mutually constitutive (Yuval-Davis, 2011), and emotions play a significant role for how social identities are invested with meanings and values.

The ways in which the children performed their social class identities highlighted that the symbolic meanings and practices of social class are rooted in economic realities (Skeggs, 1997; Weis, 2008b). Material objects (e.g. branded clothing, ‘cheap’ yogurt) are invested with values and moral connotations which have implications for the children’s standing and peer relationships in school, and intersect with other aspects of difference, e.g. gender (for example in relation to gendered consumerist discourses about toys and fashion).

Gendered interactions permeate most aspects of children’s everyday lives in school, and gender identities are performed in many different ways: as stereotypical and heteronormative (in line with ideas about hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell, 1995)), as antagonistic or competitive, and by ascribing or challenging others’ gender identities. There are different ways in which gender is performed by the children (e.g. different expressions of femininity and masculinity), and gender identities also vary along the intersections with other categories, e.g. age, social class, consumerist practices, or ethnicity.

Children performed their ethnic identities through a number of salient dimensions of ethnicity, which were mostly in line with the ‘celebratory’ multicultural discourse of diversity in Greenstone Primary. Such salient dimensions of ethnicity included language, country of origin/ nationality, food, religion and knowledge about cultural practices. Skin colour held an ambiguous position: while the children were clearly not ‘colour-blind’, but aware of differences in skin colour and their powerful social

implications, they did not use skin colour in order to talk about their *own* ethnic identities and it appeared to be ‘tabooed’ as a marker of difference in their interactions.

Dynamics of belonging and being different were important in the ways in which children performed their social identities at the intersections, and for making decisions about which aspects of their social identities to foreground. For example, ethnicity was often downplayed in friendships between children from mixed ethnic backgrounds, and emphasized between children from similar ethnic backgrounds. Although girls and boys *did* play together, close friendship groups (such as dyads and triads) were generally gender-homogeneous and gender was often foregrounded in oppositional and competitive dynamics between boys’ and girls’ groups. Classed aspects of belonging were sometimes performed explicitly (e.g. bonding over branded clothes) and often implicitly (e.g. establishing hierarchies and values related to social class through symbolic meanings).

Particular intersections produced complex and ambivalent forms of belonging and being different. For example, children may belong to multiple groups at the same time (e.g. Tahira emphasizing her links to both Pakistan and Dubai), they may belong in terms of some aspects but be different in terms of others (e.g. Catherine belonging to the group of American children but being excluded from play on the basis of her gender). At other times, children may be different in terms of multiple aspects (e.g. Fatima being excluded simultaneously from the cultural mainstream, from religious majority practices (even if these are celebrated in non-confessional, secular ways), and from the strong commercial and socio-economic aspects of celebrating Christmas).

Although this research was mainly focused on the children’s peer interactions, it became clear that their ways of performing social identities were influenced by the particular context of the school, and involved relationships with staff and me as a researcher. Despite taking place only within the setting of the primary school, this study also highlighted the importance of parental networks and wider communities beyond school for the ways in which the children performed their social identities.



Parental networks, which appeared to rely at least in part on similarities in gender, ethnicity and social class, played a key role in organising home visits and sleepovers which impacted on the children's relationships within school. The children navigated the intersections of home and school in various ways, by disclosing or concealing different aspects of their social identities in different situations. Some aspects of children's social identities were kept 'secret' in school (e.g. Raphael's Chinese name), and other aspects seemed to be in sharp contradiction (e.g. Fatima's reference to different practices in her 'world'). Children negotiated the boundary between 'in and out of school stuff' very differently, resulting in complex, and sometimes ambivalent and contradictory forms of belonging and being different in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity.

## 7.2 Implications for debates in the literature

This study has explored how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of a primary school. In this section I discuss the implications that arise from this research for existing debates in the literature on children's social identities, children's agency, and working with intersectionality and the 'triad' of social class, gender and ethnicity.

### 7.2.1 Understanding children's social identities

This study has addressed particular gaps in the literature on children's social identities of social class, gender and ethnicity, as identified in Chapter 2. By involving *5-7-year-olds* as participants, it has addressed a gap in relation to children at early primary school age, and a lack of relevant studies in the *Scottish context*. It has sought to explore the *intersecting* nature of children's social identities, and has conceptualised identities as situated and *performed*. In doing so, this study adds to, and challenges, debates in the field of research on children's social identities.

Intersectionality has recently been widely debated in academia and beyond, and the concept has seen an upsurge in popularity (Davis, 2008). This study contributes to an emerging body of research with children which uses the concept of intersectionality (although such research so far has focused mainly on older children and young people). There are no universally agreed definitions of intersectionality, and it has been aligned with different theoretical, epistemological and methodological approaches. There are thus multiple ways in which it can be operationalised in research. In this study, I have used intersectionality in order to look at 'lived experience' (Valentine, 2007) through an ethnographic approach, that is, at the multiple ways in which social identities are done and undone, and invested with different meanings, values and emotions, in the children's performing of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Rather than ‘classifying’ the children prior to the research in terms of their social class, gender and ethnicity, I have sought to explore how the children performed these different parts of their social identities and constructed their meanings and values. In doing so, this study has challenged some views in the literature (particularly on children and social class, e.g. Lareau, 2003, Streib, 2011, and ethnicity, e.g. Troyna and Hatcher, 1992, Connolly et al., 2009) which construct children as rather passively perceiving or acquiring social identities. While particularly the work of Connolly (e.g. 1998; 2003; 2004) has been influential in drawing attention to the multiple intersecting aspects of children’s identities, its reliance on a Bourdieusian framework implies a conceptualisation of identity as ‘acquired’ and relatively ‘static’ (exemplified in his use of the concept of *habitus*, see sections 2.4.3 and 2.4.4). This thesis, therefore, builds on Connolly’s recognition of the plurality and complexity of children’s social identities, but includes a more explicit focus on children’s performing and active contributions to the situated construction of their identities.

Indeed, data excerpts discussed in this study have showed that children constantly perform their social identities in complex, sometimes ambivalent ways, which may resist or conform to the discourses in the primary school. This research has also showed that a concern with the doing and the fluidity of the ways in which children perform their social identities (rather than assuming them to be stable and essentialized) draws attention to dynamics of power and the importance of context and relationships. For example, the school context may foreground or privilege particular ways of being and, therefore, it is important to explore its significance in terms of framing the children’s social identities.

For the young children (aged 5-7) who took part in this research, the school context seemed to be highly significant. Although the children in the class of this research had all visited a nursery before coming to Greenstone Primary, it was presumably their first experience (particularly for the P1 group) of being in an educational institution that is so strongly geared towards learning – not only learning skills, but also certain ways of being. There seemed to be a strong sense of pressure to fit in and ‘get it right’ for the children in this research. The many ways in which the children

performed their social identities illustrated this: while clearly social class, gender and ethnicity were all significant for the children in different moments and situations, they performed their social identities in sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit ways. As examples in this study have illustrated, the children were aware of physical differences (e.g. skin colour) but did not point these out on their own or others' bodies. This is in contrast with research with younger children (below the age of 5) which has showed their awareness of physical characteristics, such as skin colour or hair colour, and the importance of these markers for constructing ethnic boundaries, similarities or differences (Connolly, 1998, Van Ausdale and Feagin, 2001, Konstantoni, 2010). The fact that the children in this study were aware of, but did not explicitly draw on physical markers in order to perform their ethnic identities, could be explained through the fact that they were aware of the social 'taboo' of distinguishing and discriminating on the basis of skin colour and other physical differences, particularly given the fact that discourses in the school did also mute such differences.

Paying attention to the *performed* nature of social identities has highlighted the complex dynamics of belonging and being different, of peer inclusion and exclusion, which children negotiate in their everyday lives at school. This study has drawn attention to the significance of emotions for how aspects of social identities are performed in different moments. It has suggested that emotions not only are important for the temporary, situated performing of social identities, but play a part in politicized processes of constructing who belongs to certain groups, and who does not:

Emotions do things, and work to align individuals with  
collectives ... through the very intensity of their attachments.  
(Ahmed, 2004a: 26, original emphasis)

The constitutive understanding of intersectionality in this research, as advocated by Yuval-Davis (2006b; 2011) suggests a situated analysis of the multiple aspects of children's social identities. Butler's (1990) 'etc.' (as discussed in section 2.5.3.1) is a useful reminder for researchers to look for all the various aspects of social identities which potentially play a part in children's lives, even if they go beyond the original

research focus. It also means that multiple levels of analysis need to be taken into consideration. In this research, I have addressed these multiple levels in the following way:

- By exploring the complex interactional dynamics of how children perform their social identities in the everyday context of the school, through fieldwork observations and interviews with children, I have considered the *experiential level of analysis*.
- By looking at the practices and discourses in Greenstone Primary, through interviews with staff as representatives of this institution, and fieldwork observations, I have considered the *organizational level of analysis*.
- By identifying and analysing relevant texts and symbols, within and beyond the setting of the research (policies and legislation, the school's website and handbook, displays, bulletins, educational resources used in the classroom, media and commercial images present in the school) I have considered the *representational level of analysis* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983; 1992; Anthias, 2013a).

This constitutive understanding of intersectionality on multiple levels of analysis suggests that the intersections of social class, gender and ethnicity (and other categories) need to be understood as both about children's everyday experiences, as well as about the wider organisational and representational relations into which they are hooked. It thus advocates an understanding of intersectionality as not about either social identities *or* inequalities, but as seeing these two as fundamentally related and inseparable, since particular social identities may open or close opportunities to children and create moments of privilege or disadvantage. Thus, the intersections of social class, gender, ethnicity etc. are 'simultaneously subjective, structural and about social positioning and everyday practices' (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 75). This study therefore emphasises the need to explore children's social identities as intersecting, situated within particular contexts yet also linked into and shaped by wider social inequalities. This suggests that research on children's social identities

needs to go beyond their everyday experiences, and also include a focus on the importance of wider social relations and inequalities.

### **7.2.2 Revisiting children's agency**

Discussions about children's agency have been central to debates in the childhood studies field (Qvortrup et al., 1994; Jenks, 1996; Prout and James, 1997; James et al., 1998). However, as outlined in Chapter 2, the notion of children's agency has been increasingly problematized in recent years, both from within and outside the childhood studies field (Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008; Valentine, 2011; Tisdall and Punch, 2012; Oswell, 2013). Throughout this thesis, questions about children's agency have come to the fore, particularly since the view that children *perform* their social identities in different ways in different situations implies that children do have at least some kind of agency in 'choosing' the nature and style of these 'performances'.

The findings of this study have indeed shown that children exercise some form of agency in performing their social identities (for example, performing gender identities through particular expressions of hegemonic or alternative forms of masculinity/femininity, or foregrounding one's gender identity over one's ethnic identity, etc.). In line with Butler (1993), however, I have suggested that this form of agency is not a wilful act or deliberate choice, but rather that it is shaped by, and at the same time contributing to, powerful discourses which construct and value social class, gender and ethnic identities in particular ways. These discourses make available different identities to children, but in the end there can be no absolute certainty of interpretation as to why children (and adults) perform their social identities in particular ways (Frosh et al., 2003). In this research, the children performed their social identities within particular institutional discourses around 'diversity', shaped by policies, legislation and staff's activation of these texts, which marked, muted or constructed certain ways of being in ambivalent ways. Within the children's performing of their social identities also wider social discourses became manifest: children were aware of and contributed to powerful discourses about social

inequalities and stereotypes in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity. Thus, in line with recent discussions, this study adds to an understanding of agency as shaped by ‘issues of power that structure children’s lives and spaces’ (Hopkins et al., 2011: 316) and as situated, multidimensional and sometimes ambivalent (Valentine, 2011).

Through my analysis I have sought to provide (often multiple) explanations for the children’s performing of their social identities. By including data excerpts, I hope to allow the reader to decide or add different interpretations for themselves. After all, as researchers/ readers we do not stand outside the discourses under which social identities are performed and categories constructed, but through our own values, norms and concepts we contribute to these discourses in certain ways.

In fact, discussions about children’s agency do not stand outside normative discourses, and it has been argued that advocates of children’s agency are driven by particular values. For example, Tisdall and Punch (2012: 255) suggest that childhood studies’ call for a view of children as competent social actors served to ‘counteract traditional views of children as passive dependents’. However, this view constructs childhood in opposition to adulthood and draws on implicit underlying assumptions of unquestioned adult agency (Oswell, 2013). However, if the notion of adult agency is problematized, this also troubles claims about children’s agency, since both children and adults can then be seen not as independent beings, but as living their lives within wider social relations and structures (Prout, 2005; White and Choudhury, 2010; Konstantoni, 2012; Tisdall and Punch, 2012).

This study has highlighted the ways in which discourses and practices in the primary school assume a normative and simplistic view of children as ‘having’ agency. Through rhetoric and practice, staff have created a discourse that purports the idea of individualised, intentional choices through which children are expected to navigate their lives in school. This discourse stresses children’s responsibility and competency to make ‘decisions’ about their behaviours, and serves to uphold the meritocratic ideal, social order and particular ways of being within the school (e.g. bringing in ‘healthy’ snacks, making ‘good choices’ and complying to school rules). Although the language is one of *choice*, the subtext indicates that there is only one option – to

make the ‘good’ choice. However, what makes a ‘good choice’ depends on gendered, classed, cultural and other values which differ among children and staff. Thus, in this case, a discourse that purports children’s agency in an unproblematic way can actually be seen as undermining it, and ultimately oppresses rather than facilitates children’s agency. This brings to mind Bordonaro and Payne’s (2012) notion of ‘ambiguous agency’, which refers to adults’ normative practices of distinguishing between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, or ‘appropriate’ and ‘inappropriate’ (often in relation to the ‘best interests of the child’) types of agency.

A complex understanding of agency that disrupts the notion of ‘having’ or ‘not having’ agency is suggested in Klocker’s (2007) distinction between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ agency:

‘Thin’ agency refers to decisions and everyday actions that are carried out within highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives. ‘Thick’ agency is having the latitude to act within a broad range of options. (Klocker, 2007: 85)

Klocker suggests that agency needs to be viewed as fluid and relational: depending on the contexts, structures and relationships in place, people’s agency can be ‘thickened’ or ‘thinned’. She argues that there is a continuum between thick and thin agency on which all people (including children) are placed according to their particular circumstances which shape their ‘varying and dynamic capacities for voluntary and willed action’ (Klocker, 2007: 85).

This study contributes to such discussions of children’s agency which problematize notions of agency as wilful acts or choices (e.g. Gallacher and Gallagher, 2008), and calls for a greater recognition of the structural and power relations which make particular discourses available to children. This research has showed how social identities are performed within such discourses, and how they may simultaneously enable and constrain children’s agency by making certain discursive positions available to them, and closing down others: in keeping with Klocker’s (2007) distinction, discourses and practices in the school context may serve to ‘thicken’ or ‘thin’ children’s agency. For childhood studies, this means that research on



children's agency should move beyond 'proving' that children can and do 'have' some agency (which has been done already), but that the focus needs to be shifted onto those relationships, contexts and structures which serve as 'thickeners' or 'thinners' of children's agency. This implies a need for research that explores and makes visible those discourses and power relations that both constrain and enable children's agency.

### **7.2.3 Social class, gender, ethnicity: troubling categories**

Despite its growing popularity within and beyond academic disciplines, intersectionality has not yet been widely used in research with children. Of those studies that have explored intersectional aspects of children's lives through this lens, many have focused on one category (e.g. gender *or* ethnicity) and then acknowledged its intersections with other categories as they came into view. This study was thus unique in using an intersectional lens, focusing on the triad of social class, gender and ethnicity, throughout. In this section I reflect on some of the benefits and challenges of working with an intersectional lens that explores the situated performing of social identities of social class, gender and ethnicity.

Although I have mentioned 'social class, gender and ethnicity' in one breath many times throughout this study, it became clear that the meanings and relationships between these categories are complex and ambivalent. The 'classic triad' of social categories (Knapp, 2005) sits very differently in academic debates, policies and legislation, and within the discourses on diversity and difference in the primary school of this research.

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, social class, gender and ethnicity are 'different kinds of difference' (Yuval-Davis, 2006b: 199) and one way in which this difference can be conceptualised is through Fraser's (1997) differentiation of dimensions of social justice: redistribution and recognition. There have been debates on where social class, gender and ethnicity sit within these dimensions of social justice: do

they require the redistribution of goods and resources, or the recognition of differences? Fraser claims that both dimensions are necessary for achieving social justice, but that there has recently been a movement towards a politics of recognition, and a move away from redistributive politics (in line with the ‘cultural turn’ in debates on social class, as described in Chapter 2). This is indeed evidenced, for example, in the fact that socio-economic equality is not enforced in the Equality Act (2010). Although many Scottish policies address socio-economic inequalities, there are no clear guidelines for educational staff as to how to address them in practice. The policy rhetoric of ‘celebrating diversity’ and ‘tackling inequality’ could be interpreted as a politics of recognition and a politics of redistribution. However, this is not clearly defined and addressed, and there is little discussion of how ‘celebrating diversity’ and ‘tackling inequality’ may be related to each other and how these principles can or should be implemented in everyday educational practices, and in relation to the dimensions of social class, gender and ethnicity. Many questions arise in everyday life at school, and they produce tensions and ambiguous implications for practice: How can differences be recognised and celebrated without simultaneously reproducing inequalities? How can an environment be created that is *both* celebrating social identities and challenging inequalities? (For example, how can the fact that a child speaks a different language be celebrated if this also impacts negatively on their academic achievements? Should social class differences be ‘celebrated’?) Which aspects of social identities and inequalities should be prioritised – in policy and practice, but also in research?

In her later work, Fraser (2005, 2008) adds a third dimension of social justice, namely representational justice, arguing not only for *economic* and *cultural* but also for *political* justice. According to Fraser (2005: 10), these three dimensions are fundamentally interrelated: the ‘ability to make claims for distribution and recognition depends on relations of representation’, that is, on the ability to exercise one’s political voice within complex power relations shaped by cultural and economic status. For children’s social identities within educational settings, and the field of education more widely, the representational dimension of social justice raises additional questions: Who is, and who is not, represented through policy documents

and educational practices? Who is, and who is not, involved in shaping these documents and practices, and with what effects?

The in-depth attention given to details, subtleties and complex meanings of everyday interactions in this study suggests that there can be no final answers or guidelines on how to promote social justice in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity. Each situation may require different dimensions of social justice to be prioritised, and sometimes pursuing one dimension may lead to inequality in other ways (e.g. ensuring that both girls and boys spend equal amounts of time at the literacy table may mean that working-class children lose out) (see Gewirtz, 2006). Similar decisions are required from the researcher: how do we identify which aspects of social identities are relevant in a particular situation? Should we focus on what appears as salient, or look for what is silent? Whose ‘voices’ do we seek to make heard, and how do we represent them?

Personal meanings, interpretations and values are key for identifying situated dimensions of social identities and inequalities, and this is an aspect that became particularly evident to me as a researcher. Throughout the fieldwork, analysis and writing I often felt unsatisfied about the process of identifying the relevance of categories, and their meanings and values, in interactions. Some aspects of categories appeared more *visible* than others. The more visible categories appeared, the more certain I felt about my interpretations about them. For example, I found it more justifiable to identify gender as a relevant category in specific interactions than social class. Thus, also my analysis (in the same way as the performing of social identities and interactions I analysed) has foregrounded certain aspects of difference.

Gender has taken a particularly ambivalent form throughout this thesis, as it has been both an invisible and extremely visible category at the same time. It has been invisible through its relative absence in Scottish policies, and through the (presumably related) fact that it was seen as self-evident in discourses in Greenstone Primary: the gender binary was often normalised or naturalised. At the same time, gender was highly visible in my fieldwork and in teachers’ interactions with children. For example, it was common practice to separate groups of children into ‘girls and

boys' (and sometimes age) for activities and games, whereas a similar segregation by social class or ethnicity would have been perceived as highly discriminatory. As I have showed, gender was sometimes foregrounded when other factors were also at play (e.g. section 4.3.4.2). This may be explained through the fact that gender differences are often seen as 'natural' and given (despite calls to view them as socially constructed), whereas social class and ethnicity are often seen as differences that need to be 'overcome' (Verloo, 2006). Gender (along with 'race' and age) has also been shown to be a 'primary cultural frame' in Western societies: it serves as a simplified starting point for defining the people we encounter, who we are in comparison to them, and 'therefore how each of us is likely to behave' (Ridgeway and Kricheli-Katz, 2013: 5). This 'inevitable' condition of gender is exemplified also in the use of language, as it was not even possible to *write* about anyone without labelling their gender ('he, she, boys and girls' etc.). Whether I added social class and ethnicity into the data, on the other hand, usually required some kind of conscious decision.

This shows that my perspective as a researcher, the discourses within which I perform my own social identities, and the very language that is available to me, both condition and restrain my views and analysis. Thus, this study has showed the usefulness of an intersectional lens both for considering the significance of the categories of social class, gender and ethnicity, while at the same time deconstructing them through pointing out their multiple, fluid and contradictory meanings. Retaining a focus on identities, through an intersectional lens, thus renders it possible to make claims about the experiences of particular groups and about political strategies, while at the same time it also means to acknowledge that these experiences are always situated and complex.

Social class, gender and ethnicity sit differently with academic and popular discourses, and are constructed and valued differently depending on the context and people involved. Ultimately, this shows of course the shortcomings of categories altogether, since they are theoretical constructs that inevitably do not justice to lived experience. However, this study does not argue for the abandonment of categories, but suggests that there is benefit in having such discussions, in struggling around

definitions, constructing and deconstructing them. It is this process of *doing intersectionality* that I found to be its advantage for doing this research: what categories are named, what remains outside the process of naming, and who decides this. This concerns not only the subjects and settings of our research, but also our practice as researchers.

### 7.3 Implications for policy and practice

There are tensions between postmodern or poststructural views on identities, and making political claims, as I have discussed in Chapter 2. However, this research suggests that viewing social identities as situated and fluid does not mean to go down a relativist route in terms of political and practical implications, but rather raises complex questions and points towards ambiguities and contradictions. As Valentine states:

Although our identities as individuals might be multiple and fluid, power operates in and through the spaces within which we live and move in systematic ways to generate hegemonic cultures that can exclude particular social groups. (Valentine, 2007: 19)

This study has pointed out the shortcomings of a ‘celebratory’ approach to diversity, which inevitably constructs differences in ways that allow them to be celebrated, and runs the risk of muting differences that do not fit this image. This corresponds to critiques of multicultural approaches (Vandenbroeck, 2007; May, 1999). Also more pro-active anti-racist approaches have been criticized for their failure to deal with complexity in adequate ways due to their lack of consideration of other dimensions of difference (May, 1999; Bhavnani et al., 2005). There has therefore been a trend in recent years to move towards a broader rhetoric of *anti-discrimination* (see also Konstantoni, 2010). This study supports the recognition of ‘plural dimensions of social justice’ in such anti-discriminatory practices (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2003). The analysis of situated interactions in this study, drawing attention to normative assumptions, power dynamics and emotions, has highlighted the importance of paying attention to detailed, subtle and contradictory aspects of children’s social identities and social justice in everyday life in school. This study has pointed towards a need to reflect critically on the ways in which social class, gender and ethnicity are constructed in the policy and school context. In particular, it has showed the importance of problematizing assumptions about gendered behaviours and achievements. The gender binary, and stereotyped gendered traits, are often ‘naturalised’ and taken for granted or seen as given, and are therefore often foregrounded as ‘acceptable’ aspects of difference. There is thus a need to bring

gender explicitly into Scottish policies and rhetoric around social justice, and for practitioners to try and make alternative gender narratives and identities available to children through resources and role models in education and beyond. Equally, social class differences need to be explicitly acknowledged and addressed, as well as those aspects of ethnicity which produce experiences of inequalities for children and do not fit into a celebratory, multicultural discourse.

This research therefore emphasises the need for a *reflective practice* which acknowledges the complexity and sometimes contradicting nature of social justice approaches. It has highlighted the importance for staff to reflect on their own values and assumptions about diversity and difference, and to try and make available alternative discourses about social class, gender and ethnicity to children. This needs to involve a commitment to acknowledging, and challenging, the existence of discrimination and inequalities.

Critical reflection and debate are also needed in the formulation and implementation of policies around diversity and social justice. There is a need for further clarification on the meanings and normative assumptions of phrases such as ‘celebrating diversity’ and ‘tackling inequality’ in policy documents, and to acknowledge tensions within such documents.

As Ahmed (2006: 114) has argued, policy documents can be seen as ‘forms of institutional performance’. This means that institutions, through their legislation and policies, construct themselves in a certain way (e.g. a ‘diverse’ school, or university, etc.). Ahmed suggests that such policies can impede action, since they are often treated as if they ‘bring into effect what they name’ (132): for example, because an institution has an ‘excellent equality policy’, it is assumed that this makes the institution an ‘equal’ place. This study has shown how by being ‘activated’ such texts create particular discourses in the primary school, and this depends on whoever is involved in these processes of activation. Thus, policies cannot be seen as an end in themselves, but need to be vehicles for dialogue, debate and reflection. Rather than providing ‘guidance’, and thus suggesting that there are universal ways in which social justice can be promoted, policy documents could raise questions and

dilemmas, for example through case studies and interactive exercises. Children should be included in these debates, for example by providing information about current inequalities and inviting children to reflect on ways of tackling these and to think about alternative narratives and identities.

Staff at Greenstone Primary have acknowledged this need for constant reflection, as indicated in the quote that I have used in Chapter 4:

It's one of these things that we do need to keep looking at, the policy and new things that happen in education, or within society, or within school. Or it occurs to you that actually we're not really taking account of this aspect so let's go back and look at it again. So I don't think it's done and dusted, no. (Interview with Senior Management Staff, 20 June 2012)

Thus, there is a need for policies to open up spaces for debate and reflection on the subtle, contextual and intersecting aspects of social diversity and social justice, and the ways in which these are given meanings and are invested with values.

Finally, it would be important to find ways to include the views of children, parents/carers and educational staff into the formation of such policies. As this research has shown, policies create particular discourses on diversity and social identities, and if children's views are excluded from their generation, this 'has the potential to render policy both inappropriate and non-responsive' (McDonald, 2009: 241).



## 7.4 Implications for further research

This study, as well as most of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, has focused on children's social identities and experiences within an educational setting. It presents a contextualised example of a Scottish primary school, which was selected due to its particular heterogeneity in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity. Further research could explore how children perform their social identities in schools which are more homogeneous in terms of the children's backgrounds, for example by comparing different schools through a multi-sited ethnography.

While it was the aim of this research to explore how children perform their social identities in primary school, the importance of wider relationships and interactions has been highlighted a number of times throughout, e.g. through the ways in which parents network and impact on their children's relationships, and through the ambiguities and tensions which children may experience in negotiating the boundaries of 'in and out of school stuff', and different 'worlds' (as described by children in this study). Thus, further research which explores children's social identities both in schools as well as in their families and communities could usefully illuminate the overlaps and tensions between these important domains, and provide helpful insights for policy and practice in promoting social justice and respectful educational environments.

Although the 'voices' of children have been represented to some extent in this research, this has been done through selection and interpretation by myself as a researcher (Tisdall, 2009). While it has been argued that ethnographic research can be seen as participatory to a degree, e.g. in terms of children directing the focus of the ongoing research, and negotiating their relationship with the researcher (Davis, 1998; Christensen, 2004; Konstantoni and Kustatscher, forthcoming), this study has not involved children in the design, analysis and dissemination of the research. Some studies reviewed in this thesis have sought children's views on their social identities and social differences (e.g. Sutton (2007) on social class, or Moinian (2009) on ethnic identities). However, such research is generally conducted with older children and young people and does not involve them at all stages of the research, and there is

thus a lack of research which seeks the views and active participation of younger children in designing and carrying out research on their social identities and experiences within educational settings and beyond.

Finally, as I have pointed out in Chapter 3, an intersectional research approach draws attention to the question of *which* children are included in research – and which are not – and how their particular social positions (including during the research process) are shaped by various power relations. Most research on young children's social identities and peer relationships is carried out in institutional contexts, such as nurseries and schools, and in the Minority World (Corsaro, 2009; Konstantoni, 2012; Konstantoni and Kustatscher, forthcoming), and this study has not been an exception to this. There is thus a need for more research which involves young children who are not 'institutionalised', both in the Minority World (e.g. gypsy travellers), and in the Majority World.

## 7.5 Concluding reflections

This research has explored how young children perform their social identities in relation to social class, gender and ethnicity in the context of a primary school. Its key contribution was to show that the children's social identities are complex and intersecting, and need to be understood as deeply contextual, relational, and mutually constitutive. Emotions play a significant role for how social identities are invested with meanings and values, and create particular, sometimes ambivalent, forms of belonging and being different. This study has also highlighted how, through certain ways of performing social identities, wider social inequalities become manifest in the children's lives in schools. It has shown that the children's social identities are situated within and framed by the particular policies, legislations and discourses which construct difference and diversity in the primary school.

By taking a reflexive stance throughout, I have sought to explore not only the children's situated and contextualised performing of their social identities, but also the relations of the research through which these were explicated. Thus, this thesis does not stand outside the discourses on social identities, differences and diversity that it has sought to explore, but contributes to, shapes and enters them. My hope is that, when this thesis and other outputs from my research are 'activated' (Smith, 2005a) by their readers, this opens up spaces for dialogue and debates on promoting social justice and challenging inequalities, in order to

make discursive room for the becoming of new subjects, new subjectivities and new school lives. (Staunæs, 2003: 109)

As this research has shown, schools do not exist in isolation from wider social relations, and therefore this task concerns us all.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – Policies and legislations

The following policies and legislation were drawn upon in this thesis:

### **International/ European:**

- European Convention on Human Rights
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

### **British/ Scottish:**

- Achieving Our Potential
- Additional Support for Learning (Scotland) Act 2004
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Child Poverty Act 2010
- Curriculum for Excellence
- Early Years Framework
- Equality Act 2010
- Equally Well
- Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)
- Human Rights Act 1998
- National Framework for Inclusion
- Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000

In addition, local authority and school policies were included which are not listed here for reasons of confidentiality.

## Appendix 2 – Research outline



### Children's views and feelings about social differences

My name is Marlies Kustatscher and I am currently in the first year of a PhD in Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of Edinburgh. I have a strong research interest in children's perceptions of the social world and I have experience of working with children in many different contexts (please find CV attached).

#### What I want to find out: this research project

We are living in times of growing social and cultural diversity and yet there is little research on how children make sense of the world around them.

Social diversity is usually categorised in terms of different gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background. Against the backdrop of growing *socio-economic differences* in Scotland and worldwide this is my main focus of interest. However, we know that a child's identity is made up in a complex way: children may belong to the same social group in terms of their age, but they are at the same time part of different social groups in terms of their gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background.

Therefore, this research aims at exploring how children perceive and feel about the complexity of social and cultural diversity while retaining a focus on socio-economic differences. I am interested in the age group of 5 – 7 year-olds since there is no research on how children perceive social differences in these early years in which they start to interact with other children from outside their immediate family environment.

My two main research questions are:

1. How do children make sense of social differences?
2. How do children feel about social differences?

#### The setting: a primary school class in \_\_\_\_\_

Primary schools constitute the most inclusive setting for my research, since they include (almost) all local children regardless of gender, ethnicity, language, socio-economic or cultural background.

With the permission of the \_\_\_\_\_ I intend to contact \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School. I had initial informal discussions with educational staff at \_\_\_\_\_ Primary and the school has expressed an interest in my research. I am especially interested in the unique school-context of \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School because of its richness in social and cultural diversity and the school's approach of involving and celebrating diversity as part of the curriculum. I believe that this context will allow the research to explore a wide breadth of children's experiences and perceptions.

#### What the research will involve: methodology and timescale

Children are often studied as passive subjects of the world around them. However, I believe that children not only perceive but also actively engage with their environment and give meaning to it. Therefore, my methodological approach is an ethnographic one in which I hope to spend a substantial amount of time with the children in one class in order to get a deep insight into their subjective worlds.

I would like to conduct the research in 2 stages between September 2011 and March 2012.

STAGE 1 – Participant observation: I would like to be an observer in the classroom over a period of 5-6 months. During this stage I would like to observe the way in which social differences appear in the communications and interactions in the classroom and how they influence dynamics among the children. I hope to spend an initial one or two days per week in the classroom, increasing over time. Towards the end of the research, I would decrease my presence in the classroom in a similar way in order for the children to adjust in appropriate time. The amount and timing of my observations will be negotiated with the class teacher in order not to interrupt children's learning. Also my role in the classroom will be agreed on with the class teachers. During this stage I would also like to conduct an informal interview with the class teachers in order to explore their views on how this specific school-context may impact on children's views on social differences. I will not ask them to disclose any personal information about the individual children.

STAGE 2 – Interviews with the children: Towards the end of the observation period I will invite the children in pairs or groups for interviews lasting about 30 minutes. The interviews will take place on

school premises. Both dates and time of the interviews will be negotiated with the children and class teacher in order to allow for arrangements that minimise the impact on staff and children (e.g. during 'golden time').

I intend to use the method of vignettes: This means that I will present the children with fictional scenarios in the form of story books or role plays in order to explore their views and feelings but without drawing on their personal experiences. I will not ask the children to disclose personal information about their own backgrounds but invite them to reflect on the scenarios.

## Practical and ethical issues

The data of this research will be used for the completion of my PhD dissertation and possibly a number of journal articles.

- The identity of the school, teachers, parents/ carers and children will be anonymised and the data I collect will be treated confidentially.
- Only I will have access to the raw data. All digital records (audio-recordings, transcripts) will be stored on my password-protected computer and any printouts or handwritten notes will be locked in a secure place.
- Any information that reveals the participants' identity will be removed at the end of the data collection phase. After this all data will be stored in an anonymous way using pseudonyms.
- With permission from the participants, I will use short excerpts from the interviews/ observations in order to illustrate relevant chapters of the PhD thesis/ journal articles. I will use pseudonyms and choose the excerpts in a way to prevent any individuals from being recognized.
- All records will be deleted/ shredded after successful completion of my PhD (estimated: 2013/14) and the publication of journal articles.

I have a Basic Disclosure Certificate issued in June 2011. I will ensure that children, parents/ carers and education staff are clear as to the purposes and procedures of the research, issues of confidentiality and anonymity. They will be free to withdraw from participation in the research at any time.

I will obtain informed consent from the education staff, parents/ carers and children (please find drafts of information leaflets and consent forms attached below). I consider informed consent to be an ongoing process in which I will ensure that the children understand why I ask for their participation and that they can opt in or out at any time during the research.

I will provide feedback about my findings to the education staff and parents/ carers and I will also deliver feedback in a child-friendly way to the children themselves.

My academic supervisors for this PhD project are:

<p><b>Professor Liz Bondi</b> Research Programme Director in Counselling and Psychotherapy</p> <p>The University of Edinburgh School of Health in Social Science Medical School, Teviot Place Edinburgh EH8 9AG</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Professor Kay Tisdall</b> Programme Director MSc Childhood Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships</p> <p>The University of Edinburgh School of Social and Political Science Chrystal Macmillan Building, 15a George Square Edinburgh EH8 9LL</p> <p>_____</p>
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Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any additional information.

Thank you very much in advance.

Yours sincerely,

**Marlies Kustatscher**

PhD student

School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh  
Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG

[M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk), Mobile phone \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3 – Consent form for headteacher



### Consent Form for Head Teacher

Research title: Children's views and feelings about social differences

☐ I hereby give permission to Marlies Kustatscher to conduct her PhD research in *(name of class)* at *(name of school)*.

☐ I have read and understood the research outline provided.

☐ I understand that the data will be used for the completion of Marlies' PhD thesis and possible other publications.

☐ I understand that Marlies has been given permission to conduct this research by \_\_\_\_\_ Department of \_\_\_\_\_ but that this does NOT oblige *(name of school)* to take part in the research.

☐ I understand that *(name of school)* can withdraw from the participation at this research at any time and can withdraw any information that has been provided.

☐ I understand that the participation of *(name of class)* will involve Marlies' spending time in the class room and taking notes between September 2011 and March 2012 as well as short interviews with the children and class teachers. Prior to collecting any data Marlies will obtain consent from the educational staff, children and parents/ carers directly involved.

☐ I understand that all data will be treated as confidential and my name, the name of the school, educational staff and children will NOT appear on any research findings.

☐ Marlies will provide all necessary materials for the research and not use any school resources.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to hear any further information. My academic supervisors for this PhD project are:

**Professor Liz Bondi**

Research Programme Director in Counselling and Psychotherapy

\_\_\_\_\_

**Professor Kay Tisdall**

Programme Director MSc Childhood Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

\_\_\_\_\_

If you have any complaints about my research or related discomfort, please contact Seamus Prior, Chair of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Committee (\_\_\_\_\_ tel \_\_\_\_\_)

Yours sincerely,

**Marlies Kustatscher**

PhD student

School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh  
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[M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk), Mobile phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 4 – Consent form for educational staff – participant observation



### Consent Form

Research title: Children's views and feelings about social differences

Participant observation in (*name of class*) between September 2011 and March 2012

☐ I hereby agree to take part in the research of Marlies Kustatscher. The data will be used for the completion of Marlies' PhD thesis and possible other publications.

☐ I have read and understood the research outline provided.

☐ I agree to take part in the participant observation between September 2011 and March 2012. This will involve Marlies' spending time in the classroom with (*name of class*) on a regular basis and taking notes.

☐ I will be able to decide on the time and frequency of Marlies' presence in the classroom.

☐ What I say and do during the observation will be treated as confidential and my name will not appear on any research findings. Also the identity of the school and all the children involved will be anonymised.

☐ I understand that I will be able to withdraw from my participation at this research at any time and I can withdraw any information I have provided.

☐ I understand that, should any significant concerns about a child's well-being arise, Marlies will raise them with me first and then inform the Head Teacher.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to hear any further information. My academic supervisors for this PhD project are:

**Professor Liz Bondi**

Research Programme Director in Counselling and Psychotherapy

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Professor Kay Tisdall**

Programme Director MSc Childhood Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any complaints about my research or related discomfort, please contact Seamus Prior, Chair of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Committee (\_\_\_\_\_, tel \_\_\_\_\_)

Yours sincerely,

**Marlies Kustatscher**

PhD student, School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh  
Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG, [M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk), Mobile phone: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 5 – Information and opt-out form for parents/ carers



Dear Parent/ Carer,

### Research project on children's views and feelings about social differences

I am a research student at the University of Edinburgh and I have been given permission by \_\_\_\_\_ from the Children and Families Department and the Head Teacher to carry out my research in *(name of class)* at *(name of school)*.

I am trying to find out how children perceive and feel about social and cultural diversity, with a focus on socio-economic differences. As part of my research I will spend time with the class each week between September 2011 and March 2012 and observe the children's interactions. I will also ask the children to take part in an interview in pairs or groups. I will NOT ask the children to disclose any personal information about themselves and their families but instead use stories and role plays to find out about their opinions.

The children can decide at any time not to take part in my research.

The answers will be put together into a PhD report and a number of journal articles to help adults understand children better. The report will not name the children or the school and it will be written in a way that no individual children or families can be recognized.

Whatever your child does and says will be treated as confidential. I would only disclose any information if significant concerns arise about a child's well-being. If such a case would occur I would work within school procedures.

You can contact me by email ([M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk)) or if you wish any further information please phone Professor Liz Bondi (\_\_\_\_\_) or Professor Kay Tisdall (\_\_\_\_\_).

Yours sincerely

Marlies Kustatscher

If you are happy for your child to take part in the research you do not need to do anything. But if you DO NOT wish for your child to take part please return the slip below to the school.

---

### Please return this slip to the school

I DO NOT WANT my child to take part in this research project.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ parent/ guardian

## Appendix 6 – Information leaflet and initial consent form for children

(printed A4 both-sided and folded into a 'booklet')

**Would you like to be part of my project?**

You can say **STOP** at any time.

If you are happy that Marlies talks to you and takes notes please put a **sticker** here!

**OK**  
I WANT TO  
DO IT

**Thank you!**


If you want to contact me...


This is my email address: [M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk)

And this is my workplace address:

Marlies Kustatscher  
The University of Edinburgh, School of Health in Social Science  
Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_,

 My name is **Marlies Kustatscher**

I am a student at 

**I would like to learn what children think and feel about the world.**

**I would like to...**

Spend time with you every week  
from now until Spring.

Talk to you and ask you questions:

- WHAT THINGS MATTER TO CHILDREN?
- WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK MAKES PEOPLE SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT TO EACH OTHER?
- WHAT DO CHILDREN THINK AND FEEL ABOUT BEING SIMILAR OR DIFFERENT?

If you are OK with it I will write down what you say. Then I will write a report about what I have learned from you. I will not use your real name so who reads the report will not know who you are. If you say something that makes me think you or someone else are being hurt I will speak to someone who can help.

## Appendix 7 – Interview information leaflet for educational staff



### Interview information leaflet

Research title: Children's views and feelings about social diversity

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Conducting my research within \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School allows me to observe children's interactions in a diverse environment.

Speaking to you would allow me to gain important background information about this specific setting, which will inform my general findings. Therefore I would like to ask you a few questions in a short interview (about 20 minutes).

I will not ask you to disclose any personal information about individual children, but I am interested to learn about the school's perspective on working with social diversity.

The core questions of my interview would be:

- How does working in a diverse environment influence teaching/ working as a (deputy) headteacher?
- Which educational or policy guidelines inform working with social diversity at \_\_\_\_\_ Primary?

Everything you say will be treated as confidential, and of course you will be able to say if you don't want to answer any questions. You will also have the possibility to withdraw anything you have said. Your identity and the identity of the school will be anonymised.

It would be very helpful if you are willing to offer me your expert knowledge and time.

Yours sincerely,

**Marlies Kustatscher**

PhD student

School of Health in Social Science, The University of Edinburgh

Medical School, Teviot Place, Edinburgh EH8 9AG

[M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk), Mobile phone: \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any complaints about my research or related discomfort, please contact Seamus Prior, Chair of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Committee (\_\_\_\_\_).

## Appendix 8 – Interview guideline for educational staff

### Interview guideline

**Research title: Children's views and feelings about social diversity**



Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today.

As you know, I am researching how children think and feel about social diversity, with a focus on socio-economic differences. Conducting the research within \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School allows me to observe the children's interactions in a diverse environment.

In order to get a better picture of this specific setting, I would like to ask you a few questions in a short interview (about 20 minutes). Your answers will inform my general findings.

If you do not wish to answer any questions please say so. If you would like to stop the interview it is fine at any time as well.

I would like to audio-record the interview and ask you to fill out a form of consent. After the interview I will come back to it to check if you are still happy that I use your answers in an anonymous way for my dissertation.

### **Social diversity and working at \_\_\_\_\_ Primary School**

- How does working in a diverse environment influence working as a head/ deputy head teacher/ teacher/ teaching assistant?
- Are there any specific advantages? Any examples from everyday life?
- Are there any specific challenges? Any examples from everyday life?

(If socio-economic, gender, ethnicity have not all been mentioned, I will ask specifically.)

### **The policy context**

- Which educational or policy guidelines inform working with social diversity at \_\_\_\_\_ Primary?
- How explicitly do they define and address social diversity?
- Are there any trainings provided on working with social diversity?
- Examples of how they are used/ implemented in everyday life?

This is the end of my questions for you.

- Is there anything you would like to add or any questions you would like to ask?
- Are you still happy for me to use this recording?

Thank you very much for offering your time and knowledge.

**Marlies Kustatscher**

PhD student

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## Appendix 9 – Interview consent form for educational staff



### Consent Form

Research title: Children's views and feelings about social diversity

#### Interview

- ☐ I hereby agree to take part in an interview with Marlies Kustatscher. The data will be used for the completion of Marlies' PhD thesis and possible other publications.
- ☐ I have read and understood the research outline provided.
- ☐ I agree that the interview will be audio-recorded.
- ☐ What I say during the interview will be treated as confidential and my name will not appear on any research findings. Also the identity of the school and all the children involved will be anonymised.
- ☐ I understand that if I do not wish to answer any questions or stop the interview I am free to do so at any time. I can withdraw any information I have provided.
- ☐ I give permission to the researcher to use short quotations from the interview in an anonymised way in order to illustrate relevant chapters of the PhD thesis.
- ☐ I would like to see the interview transcript before it will be used for the research and optionally clarify or withdraw any statements within 4 weeks of receipt.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you would like to hear any further information. My academic supervisors for this PhD project are:

**Professor Liz Bondi**

Research Programme Director in Counselling and Psychotherapy

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

**Professor Kay Tisdall**

Programme Director MSc Childhood Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any complaints about my research or related discomfort, please contact Seamus Prior, Chair of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethics Committee (\_\_\_\_\_, tel \_\_\_\_\_)

Yours sincerely,

**Marlies Kustatscher**

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[M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk](mailto:M.Kustatscher@sms.ed.ac.uk), Mobile phone: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 10 – List of publications

The following methodological contributions, arising from this research, have been accepted for publication during the course of this study:

KUSTATSCHER, M. 2013. *Using magnets to visualise informed consent in school-based fieldwork with children* [Online]. Available: [http://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ERIC\\_Compndium\\_Case-Studies\\_Informed-Consent\\_Marlies-Kustatscher.pdf](http://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ERIC_Compndium_Case-Studies_Informed-Consent_Marlies-Kustatscher.pdf) [Accessed 7 August 2014].

KUSTATSCHER, M. 2014. Expressing consent through movable magnetic pictures in school-based ethnographic research. In: JOHNSON, V., HART, R. & COLWELL, J. (eds.) *Steps to engaging young children in research. Volume 2: The researcher toolkit*. Education Research Centre, University of Brighton.: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

KUSTATSCHER, M. 2014. Informed consent in school-based ethnography – using visual magnets to explore participation, power and research relationships. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 5 (4.1), 686-701

KONSTANTONI, K. & KUSTATSCHER, M. forthcoming. Ethnography, participation and early childhood research. In: FARRELL, A., KAGAN, S. & TISDALL, E. K. M. (eds.) *Sage Handbook of Early Childhood Research*. London: Sage.